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THE STORY OF MY LIFE

U.V.Sàminàtha Iyer

Translated by
K.S. Subramanian

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('En Charitthiram')

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Dr. U.V. Sáminátha Iyer

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SAHITYA AKADEMI

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THE STORY OF MY LIFE

U.V.Sáminátha Iyer

1. OUR VILLAGE

About 200 years ago, a king who had ruled the Thanjávoor State embarked on a tour of inspection of his domain along with his retinue. He savoured the scenic beauty en route and also offered worship at the holy sites. As a part of the tour, he stayed in a place near Pápanásam some fifteen miles east of Thanjávoor. Had his meal and as but usual, had a round of betel leaves and areca nuts, and was resting. While having a chat with those around, it came to his notice that it was Ekádasi day. It was the king's ritual practice to have only one meal on Ekádasi day. He would also not chew betel leaves and areca nuts on that day. Unknowingly he had broken the code that day. Had he been in Thanjávoor, the palace astrologer would have referred to the almanac and advised him each morning the day's star, the auspicious and inauspicious time slots as also any special festive occasion falling on that day. He was given special grants for providing this advisory service.

The palace astrologer had not accompanied the king during this tour. So he didn't realize the incidence of Ekádasi day. The king felt sad about the unexpected transgression of the ritual norm, and started consulting a few elders regarding the appropriate atonement. Everyone knew that

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he was wedded to Vedic prescriptions and was also a very benevolent person. Keeping this in mind, the elders gave him the following advice: "Establish an *agraháram*. Build houses there. Donate these houses and some land to Brahmins steeped in Vedic learning. This action would absolve you of this sin".

"No big deal. We will do accordingly. Let us establish the agraháram right here" – the king ordered that necessary steps be taken at once. Forty eight houses were constructed as also twenty four wells, one to be shared by two houses. Got forty eight Brahmins with Vedic learning from near and far. Gave away the houses to them; three acres of wet land and some dry land as well. As it constitutes Uthama [noble] Dánam [grant], that village came to be called Utthamadánapuram.

The king's ritual default landed forty eight families in good fortune. All of them lived in Utthamadánapuram strictly observing the Vedic ritual norms. Even today the land parcels granted to these forty eight families remain in tact. Without losing its name, Utthamadánapuram continues to preserve its identity in the Pápanásam taluk of Thanjávoor district with its complement of forty eight pieces of land, forty eight houses and twenty four wells.

In olden times this village was called Pazhaiyagaram. Agaram means agraháram. Pazhaiya means old. The village got this name possibly because it was older than the other agraháram in the area. It is believed that the Farmers Street of today had once been the Brahmins' residential area, and that these Brahmins shifted to the new *agraháram* based on the king's grant. There is a Perumál statue at the western end of the Farmers Street and a Vináyaká temple for the 'Vináyaká who bestowed eyesight', at the eastern end.

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These constitute the evidence of the earlier presence of an agraháram there. During the special Bramotsavam festival, Lord Srinivása Perumál, the deity of Pápanásam would be visiting the Perumál in the Farmers Street and the Perumál temple at the new agraháram in Uthamadánapuram.

There are only two streets in the Utthamadánapuram agraháram. One runs east-west and the other south-north. Two wings in each street. Perumál temple at the western end of the east-west street and a Shivá temple at the southern end of the south-north street. Lakshmi Náráyana Perumál is the Perumál's holy name. There is a tank in the Shivá temple. Lakshmi Theertham, its name. Kailásanátha is the name of the Lord consecrated in the Shiva temple. Ánandavalli, the holy name of Shiva's consort. The village folk lavished devotion on the Vináyakamurthy idol in the Shiva temple. Those who live in this village as also those who had shifted elsewhere invariably pay special homage to this Vináyaká idol before any auspicious function in their homes. They don't forget this Vináyaká even during the seemingly trivial ear-lobe piercing ceremonies. The daily poojás and special festivals are conducted in these two temples in devout regularity.

This is our village. There is a lot of difference between today's Uthamadánapuram and what I proudly refer to as 'Our Village'. It is the village of my early days that is enshrined in my mind. Many amenities of life of today were absent then. No roads, no shops, no officials, no trundling sound of trains. But, there was beauty; there was peace; there was contentment among people; there was devotion. There was joy in their faces; and auspiciousness in their homes.

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The Utthamadánapuram residents of those days did not possess properties which could be calculated and denominated in rupees. But there was wealth of water and of grains. No haste in their lives. No shortcoming on this account. There was peace in their hearts. Now we have lost that peace and keep running at headlong speed. The more this speed the more the gulf between us and that peace.

There were many canals around our village. The main canal branching from the Kudamurutti river was an important one. Elders would wake up at sunrise and bathe in the Kudamurutti river. Those who could not trek this distance would have their bath in a nearby canal or tank. The river ran some one-and-a-half miles to the north of the village. One could reach there only by traversing a dirt track; should also negotiate the ridges of the field. During the sunrise phase, one could see Brahmins donning dhotis yellowing with months of washing, with foreheads full of vibhoothi holy ash, and lost in devotional chants. Looking at them we would instinctively feel a reverence towards them. After performing *Gáyathri Japa* and other rituals, they would perform the salutation to the Sun God.

Then, a change in the scene. After their meditation and rituals, they would venture out with spades and sickles. These Brahmins with sturdy bodies would spend time in the fields till midday, supervising work and also being directly involved in the field chores. On returning home they would perform midday poojá, have their meal and read Rámáyaná and Mahábhárathá stories. They would savour books in Tamil and Sanskrit, either reading or by listening to someone reading the texts.

They would again go to the fields, attend to the work and return home by about six in the evening. Thereafter

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would perform Sandhyávandaná at Lakshmi Theertham and proceed to the temple for darshan. On returning home, would have their night snack and listen to Puránás till nine in the night. Occasional *bhajan* sessions too.

They evinced a lot of interest in setting up and nursing vegetable gardens and in tending cows and buffaloes. They were used to hard physical labour from their early years. As they spent their time in physical work and in spiritual pursuits, they had neither the time nor the inclination to get involved in other kinds of activities.

There were three sects among the Brahmins in my village: *Mádhyamás, Vadamás and Ashtasahasrás*. There was also one Nambiár family performing poojás in the Vaishnavaite temple, and an Ádi Saiva family performing priestly duties in the Shiva temple. The seven-eight Ashtasahasra families were all priests. They serviced the ritual needs of the neighbouring agraháram and lived in comfort. Carefree as they were, they were also endowed with physical strength. Were not therefore hassled by ailments.

There was a Brahmin in Utthamadánapuram by name Anná Josier. He led a comfortable life with his knowledge of astrology. One day this strongly built Brahmin had a Bráhmanártha meal in a village and was returning home in a jolly mood, his torso smeared with fragrant sandal paste, his mouth brimming with betel-areca cud and his tuft radiating the aroma of jasmine flower. The Thanjavoor District Collector was camping in Pápanásam. When this Brahmin was on his way home, the Collector and his head clerk were standing outside the camp. The Collector was a White man and the head clerk an Indian.

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The Collector's eyes landed on Anná Josier. The Collector was struck by his sturdy frame, majestic gait and the glow on his face. At a whim he called him and asked him a few questions through his head clerk:

Collector : Do you know how to read?

Josier : I do.

Collector : Can you review accounts?

Josier : Yes. I am well-versed in Astrology. So, I am good at computations.

Collector : Can you handle village accounts?

Josier : If you give me a chance, I will do a good job of it.

The Collector was pleased with the Josier's confident manner. He believed that the Josier could confidently exercise authority and that people would obey him. The Collector was contemplating to dismiss the village accountant in Ukkadai revenue unit due to his inefficiency and was looking for a replacement. He appointed Anná Josier in the job*. Those days there was no competitive selection process for such jobs. If a senior official is impressed with someone's looks and intelligence, the person would straightaway be appointed.

It should not be mistaken that Anná Josier was the only person endowed with a sturdy physique which attracted the Collector's attention. Every such employee was physically well endowed. They used to eat food full of nourishment.

There were traditional grants to the carpenters, blacksmiths, goldsmiths, fishermen, barbers and dhobis in Ut-

* *A person from his family is presently working as the village munsiff in Uthamadánapuram.*

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thamadánapuram. They enjoyed these grants and performed their assigned roles efficiently. Some barbers were also knowledgeable in native medicine. They caringly treated the ailing persons by administering potions made out of herbs and other ingredients. For their treatment they charged a mere four annas[one anna was 1/16th of a rupee] as their fee. One barber was also adept in surgical procedures. He had many ancient medical treatises. While these texts contain treatment regimens for different kinds of diseases, not all these diseases visited those patients.

Some families from the farmer communities took care of the farming activities in lands owned by some Brahmins and lived in the house plots allotted to them. They used to take good care of these lands. Would also attend to the miscellaneous chores in the houses of their landlords. The Brahmins used to extend all facilities to these people. This left them contented. They toiled with sincerity. In fact, they had greater interest and concern in the land, even more than the landlords themselves. Both these sections had love and respect for each other and forged a mutually beneficial relationship.

A few other farmers tilled their own land. There were a few temples for the village deities, the special objects of their devotion. Thanks to the harmony among the villagers, temple festivals were celebrated regularly.

Four agraháram surrounded this village: Kottaichery in the south-east, Málapuram in the south-west, Gopurájapuram to the west and Annikkudi to the north-west. *Vadakalai Vaishnavites* versed in Vedic lore lived in Kottaicheri. In Málapuram lived learned Sri Vaishnavaites and two kinds of *Smártha* Brahmins – Ashtasahasram and Vadamás. Maharáshtra Brahmins related to the Thanjávoor royal guru

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lived in Gopurájapuram. They were called Pundits. As they were wealthy, they used to offer doles. Telugu Brahmins lived in Annikkudi. Many of them had expertise in music, dance and astrology. There is a reference in Sangam Poetry to a philanthropist by name Anni. It was said that this village was named after him.

Nalloor, a village east of Utthamadánapuram, was a Saivite holy site sanctified by the Saivite lore Theváram. One of the sixty-three canonical Saivite saints, Amar Needhi Náyanár was born here. A Saivite temple there is perched on a hillock. It was clearly visible from our village. To the north-west was Thiruppáláithurai, again a holy Saivite site sanctified by Theváram. Wealthy Maharáshtrian Brahmins called Peshwás lived there.

Among these villages nestled my own village – with people who shunned sloth, unmarked by the onslaught of modernity, sharing the bounty offered by the land, and leading a peaceful and contented life.

Utthamadánapuram was only a small village. But, it was our village. A village that was the seedbed of my early happy memories; a village that lavished charm on my young eyes not exposed to the wide world. Is it at all possible for any other village or town to have occupied such a privileged place in my heart?

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2. MY ANCESTORS

"I am planning to feed ten thousand Brahmins. I seek Your Majesty's help to fulfil my desire" - so implored a person with a king. The king lavished a lot of wealth on him. He collected the funds, heartily fed two Brahmins in his house and also gave them some money as gift.

His neighbour knew the person's ways. He asked him: "You had cheated the king by saying that you are going to feed 10,000 Brahmins and pocketed a sizeable sum. But, you have fed only two Brahmins". The clever person was not to be outwitted. He replied: "Don't you realize that I have ritually fed not ten thousand but eleven thousand persons?"

"What a fraud is this? You fed just two persons and you have the gall to claim that you fed 11,000?" The neighbour persisted with his questioning. The clever man was equal to the challenge. "One of my guests is an Ashtasahasram (belonging to the 8000 sect) and the other to the '3000' sect. Don't they add up to 11,000?" The person who complained could understand the trickery involved.

One Brahmin of the Ashtasahasram sect and a *Dikshidar* of Chidambaram had been provided the ritual feast. The Chidambaram Dikshidar sect is referred to as the sect of 3000. This clever man was smart enough to add up to the hefty 11,000!

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Whether the story was true or false, I had myself used this trick just for fun. "I may be just one person, but I am 8000" – I have used this pun on a few occasions. Those who listened to me would make their own meanings of my remark. "I am sure you know that Ashtasahasram is a sect among Brahmins. It means 8000. And, I belong to that sect". Only with this explanation would they be able to understand the pun involved.

When 8000 Brahmins were moved as a group from North India, they must have been called Ashtasahasram. Even after they spread to many parts and multiplied tenfold or twentyfold, the term Ashtasahasram has persisted. This sect of Smártha Brahmins live in different parts of Tamil Nadu today.

There are three sub-sects within this sect. They are called by three village names: Athiyoor, Aruváppádi and Nandivádi. The identity of Nandivádi is not presently known but the persons belonging to this sub-sect live in places such as Thepperumál Nallur and Thiruvaiyáru. Aruváppádi is located three miles north-east of Máyavaram on the way to Thirukkurukkai and close to Thiruneedoor. Aruváppádi is still known by the same name. A group by name Aruválar finds mention in a few ancient Tamil texts. I believe that Aruváppádi could have been the place peopled by them. The Ashtasahasram people there eked out a living with whatever work they could manage to get.

Athiyoor is in South Arcot district. The Brahmins there were versed in the knowledge of sástrás and were steeped in Vedic norms and devout behaviour. They lived in harmony in that village. A story is prevalent among the people of my sect about this village.

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A Brahmin had come to Athiyoor from another village. After a light meal in a house, he took rest on the thinnai of the house. He woke up at midnight and went to a discreet corner to the north to pass urine. The security man of the village caught hold of him, taking him to be a thief.

"From which village?" He asked.

"Of course, from this village", was the reply.

The security guard wouldn't believe it. "I am sure you don't belong here. If you are from this village you wouldn't be doing this".

"What crime have I committed?" asked the Brahmin.

"You were facing the north while pissing. Our village folk would not indulge in such unseemly conduct", said the security guard.

Facing north and passing urine was considered ritually improper conduct. As this ritual norm was scrupulously observed in that village, the security guard could make out that the person belonged to a different village. Does this story not vouch for the strict adherence to ritual norms practised by the village folk here?

The Ashtasahasram sect migrated from Athiyoor and settled in Thanjávoor, Kumbakonam, Pudukkottai, Madurai and Thirunelveli. One of them settled down in Pazhayagaram known later as Utthamadánapuram. He was a staunch devotee of Sri Venkatesa Perumál of Tiruppathi, and adopted Him as his family deity. He named his son as Vadamalaiappan(Lord of Northern Hill). Vadamalai refers to Thiruvenkadam or Tirupathi. Appan is the holy name of Tirupathi Venkatáchalapathi. It is also known as Vadamalai Yágnán. Yágnán and Appan are synonyms. Vadamalai Appan had unbounded devotion for Venkatáchala-

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pathy. From those days, whatever be the names given to the male children of this family during the Upanayanam holy thread ceremony, the ritual name would be Venkatáchalam, Venkatanáráyanan, Venkataráman, Venkatasubramanian, Srinivásan etc. The name of Tiruppathi Perumál would invariably find a place. Brahmins are called 'twice-born', one birth prior to Upanayanam and another birth as a full-fledged Brahmin after Upanayanam. Apart from the twice-born status, those belonging to the Vadamalai Yágnán lineage also continue to be twice-named!

On the Saturdays of Purattási month, both men and women belonging to this family would have their bath in the morning and visit a few houses in their wet clothes and seek ritual alms. Would bring the rice so obtained, place it before the consecrated icon in the house, ceremonially prostrate before the idol and partake of the food prepared from this rice. This ritual would continue at the night time too. Persons belonging to the other families in the village also started adopting this practice. It continues to this day.

The Vadamalaiappar family was endowed with good landed property. One person in his lineage was Srinivása Iyer. Venkatasubbayyar and Venkatanáráyana Iyer were his two sons. Venkatasubbayyar moved to Suraikkávur, his father-in-law's village, administered the land granted to his wife as dowry and continued to live in that village. Venkatanáránayyar lived comfortably in Utthamadánapuram, managing his landed properties.

All the persons in this village were endowed with good health. Hard work and healthy lifestyle added to their strength. Against this background, Venkatanáráyanayyar's lean frame appeared conspicuous. He acquired a nickname of 'sonan' or skinny guy. It was a common practice to call

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skinny persons as 'sonan' or 'soni'. His house came to be known as 'sonan' home even by future generations. That was our house. He was my great grandfather; my father's father's father.

It was an old practice to honour the memory of heroes by planting a stone called 'hero stone'. Likewise, a stone called 'Masádhi kal' used to be planted to commemorate chaste women. These stones remind us of these ancestors. Even during my great grandfather's lifetime, a stone was in place to mark his name. That stone is still in place. It is not like the other marker stones lying without use. It continues to be useful for everyone.

On the bathing ghat of our village tank there is a stone called 'Sona Grandpa's Stone'. After his bath Venkatanáráyanayyar used to wash his clothes on this stone. Thereafter the name got stuck. Over the years, so many would have washed their clothes on so many stones. But does every stone attract such enduring fame? Even today, whenever I look at this stone near the tank, my hands instinctively join in devotion. This mere stone not marked by any formal grant, reminds me of my venerable great grandfather. This had been sanctified by his touch.

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3. MY GRANDFATHER (THÁTHÁ)

My *Tháthá* Venkatáchala Iyer was the eldest son of Venkatanáráyana Iyer. He had a younger brother by name Ayyákkutti Iyer. Chellathammál was his wife's name. My Pátti. Her father Odhanavaneswarar was a Tamil scholar. (Odhanavaneswarar is the ritual name of Lord Shivá as consecrated in Thiruchotruthurai.) Her mother was a sister of Music Vidwán Krishna Iyer.

My *Pátti*, raised in a family versed in music and Tamil, was a natural singer. She had a rich repertoire of keerthanás - compositions with more stress on the text than on rágá. She would stoically bear the taunts and ill-treatment of my Tháthá. I fondly recall that when I was a young boy she used to place on my palm morsels of mashed food and I would tuck into it.

As my family had incurred debt during my grandfather's time, he had mortgaged his landed property and settled the debt. He knew that this action would mean financial difficulty for his family as it would lose the income from the land. But his system would not accept the food, with debt looming large over his head. 'Quarter belly of food is enough if not tainted by debt' is an adage. 'Let me earn my keep by some toil. And no pressure of debt for me'. This was his resolve.

He was well-versed in Tamil, Sanskrit and Arithmetic. So, without lamenting his lot, he set up a school and started

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teaching many students. With the income from his teaching, he managed to lead a frugal life. He also became the father of a daughter by name Ammaniammál and two sons Venkatasubba Iyer and Srinivása Iyer. Venkatasubba Iyer was my *Appá*.

I vividly remember my grandfather. It was he who taught me the basic alphabets. Also taught me many devotional hymns through a process of rote memory. All these I have forgotten now. But I am not able to forget the many hard blows he blessed me with!

I don't remember him as a teacher. My grandfather as an old man is my enduring memory. My grandmother predeceased him. Thereafter my mother used to take care of him.

My grandfather was very fond of my father. He was keen that he should be by his side when he died and also ensured it. When my father had gone out of our village for a few months along with his younger brother, my grandfather used to be forlorn. He was expecting my father's return everyday. One day he was told that my father was returning and that he had reached the street corner. Tháthá's emotion burst its banks. He called me by his side and told me with sobs, "Sá,á.... Your Appá has come da". It appeared like a child crying at the sight of her mother after some separation. Does it matter in what form love manifests itself? It is all the same in causing great sorrow on separation.

In his ripe old age, Tháthá was in constant grip of sorrow caused by the loss of his dear wife and by frequent separation from his son. He also nursed a grievance that he was not receiving proper attention. I used to play the emissary to inform my mother about his requirements. Thanks to this assignment I got the nickname 'eggplant chutney'

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during my early days. Thátha was responsible for this honour!

During the mornings, Thátha used to sit on the thinnai in the house opposite enjoying the morning sun. That was a period of my father's absence from the village.

Ammá would send me to Thátha to ascertain his choice of menu. I was then six years old.

I would go to Thátha and ask him, "What is your menu choice for today?"

"Menu?" – He would repeat sarcastically. He had a pronounced cynicism about everything. "Oh food? A lump of clay, street dust and ash dumplings", he would say. At that age I did not realize that these words only reflected his general disdain for everything.

I would rush inside the house and dutifully repeat Thátha's every word to Ammá. "You madcap. Go and ask Thátha what he wants to eat for lunch", she would send me back.

I would go back to Thátha and repeat the question. He would appear to ponder for a while and ask, "Is eggplant available?" I would rush inside the house again and come back with a reply. Then, the next question: "Is it tender?". Running inside again.

"Get the eggplant roasted..." He would pause for a while.

"Got it? Should be roasted well...should be seasoned".

I would keep saying "hmm...hmm...". Otherwise his words would come to a halt.

"While seasoning she might add 'urud dhal'. Shouldn't be done. Tell her not to add too much oil for seasoning".

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For some reason anger will overtake him at this point. Silence for a little while. Then he would start again.

"Should be placed on the Ammi stone slab. Then the stone roller should be rolled on it again, again, again. The cud would emerge well ground".

He would repeat the word 'roll' over and over again. It would be accompanied by matching gestures. Anyone watching those gestures would feel that even those actually grinding the eggplant chutney would not evince such intense interest.

Having heard Tháthá's elaborate instructions I would start running towards the kitchen. He would stop me on my tracks and call me, "Dey, come here". He would issue the warning again. "You get what I mean? Ask her to grind it by rolling the rolling pin again and again. Shouldn't put the urud dhal at that point". I would dutifully relay the instructions to Ammá.

I used to frequently play the emissary to Ammá to relay Tháthá's instructions on the culinary nuances of preparing eggplant chutney and on other miscellaneous matters. The neighbours who had watched my 'conveyor belt' role decided to tag the name of 'eggplant chutney' to me.

Those days the position of women was indeed pathetic. In most houses they were subjected to a lot of hardship at the hands of their father-in-law, mother-in-law and sisters-in-law. While the life those days was good in most respects, there was serious shortcoming in this matter.

My mother used to listen storically to the umpteen complaints of my grandfather. While she took time to go to a nearby village we had to stay en route in a village called Mananchaeri. It was evening. An old man was sitting on

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the thinnai of the house , wrapped in a woolen shawl. He directed his grandson to bring water to perform Sandyávandanam. He brought the Panchapátra tumbler and said that the Uddarani spoon was missing. The old man flew into a rage. "Go and search properly. She would have shoved it in the ash in the hotwater oven. Go and look".

Anger was simmering in every word of his. Sure enough the 'she' in his sentence must have referred to his daughter-in-law.

Those words did fall on my mother's ears. "Oho! I thought you are present only there. Here too?" said my mother. As a kid I could not understand the significance of her remark. Could figure it out only later. I believe my mother was pleased that a grumpy father-in-law ruled the roost in this house too.

Some men in my village used to take to sanyás in their ripe old age, stay as sanyási for some time and then attain siddhi. Thereafter they were interned in a *Samádhi*. There are a few such samádhis in the village. They remained uncared for. Some old women would slap cow-dung cakes on those samádhis and let them dry.

When my grandfather was seriously ill a priest told him, "You are getting on in years. Why don't you take to emergency sanyás?". On hearing this my Tháthá did not think of the glory of sanyás or the related strict norms. He could only think of the pathetic condition of the samádhis dotting the village, and immediately exclaimed, "Aiyai-yo...! Definitely not for me. If I take to sanyás, odd old women like Seshi and Kuppichi would flatten their dripping cow-dung cakes against my head. I would like to be spared this honour".

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Sivaguru Pillai was a Thásildár in Kumbakonam those days. He had once come to my house. My father and he were acquaintances. He had some tiffin in my house. Then Appá told Tháthá : "He is Thásildár. Should you choose to request him, he would sure extend some help to our family. You may like to chat with him". Thereafter, out of politeness, he went out of the house.

Tháthá made some polite conversation with the Thásildár. The Thásildár too inquired about Tháthá's welfare. And his reply was a litany of woes. "I am bothered by many ailments. No proper appetite. Constant stomach ache. Digestion is no good". He was lost in the story of his woes. Forgot all about the problems faced by his family. Sivaguru Pillai vaguely registered Tháthá's stories with peripheral hearing and left.

"You don't seem to have sought any help for the family." Father complained to Tháthá.

"Forgot all about it. Can think of it during his next visit", replied Tháthá. That next visit never materialized. Two years after my Pátti's death Tháthá also passed away.

While lying in his deathbed he called the family members one by one and volunteered free advice. He called my mother and told her, "You have taken such good care of me. But I had been so harsh on you on many occasions. Don't take it to heart. You are a fine girl". Then he pulled out a small bundle from near his pillow. He slowly untied the knot. " I have kept this with me for many years. Was of great use to me. Please keep this in my memory. What else do I have to give? May you live happily". So saying he handed over two old needles to Ammá. She received it with great respect. Tháthá used to mend his clothes with the help of those needles. Ammá kept those needles very carefully

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for many years.

I remember Tháthá only as a very old man. I realize it is not proper to discern his nature only on the basis of those memories. It is but normal for most old people to be infected by some of those qualities.

Tháthá was a resolute person. He mortgaged his land which had been providing sustenance to the family, all with a view to settling the family debt. This vouched for his courage and self-esteem. Thereafter he set up a school, taught many children and lived with honour. These are pointers to his sense of self-worth.

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4. A FEW ELDERS

Ayyákkutti Iyer:

Ayyákkutti Iyer was my grandfather's younger brother. First he learnt Vedas; then the epic dramas in Sanskrit; had learnt Rámáyaná, Mahábháratha, Bhágavatha and Hálásya Maháthmiya to an extent that he could conduct discourses on these ancient texts; also had a good grounding in native medicine, astrology, manthra incantations and Yoga. Was also well versed in music. Had learnt *manthra* counselling from a savant in Malayalam.

He married three wives, one after the other. All the three died young. Had no children. After his family fortune took a dip due to debt problems, he didn't wish to continue in Utthamadánapuram with no worthwhile work on hand. After his elder brother set up and ran a school, he found it against his nature to hang around in the village as an idler. Those days persons with ability to conduct discourses on epics were held in esteem and in demand. So Ayyákkutti Iyer realized that he could earn a decent living wherever he went. Accordingly he started touring many places in Tamil Nadu conducting discourses on ancient epics.

He was a loner; had limited wants; he was full of qualities that could capture the hearts of people. The *poojás* he conducted were considered special. He also used to conduct special poojás to Sri Panchamuka Ánjaneyá. The statuette he had offered prayers to, is even now kept in the Shiva temple in Utthamadánapuram, receiving daily prayers.

He was respected wherever he went. Those days the village folks used to be devout, with firm faith in Astrology

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and Manthras. Therefore, they lauded Ayyákkutti Iyer as a great *yogi*, a *gnáni* and a guru. He used to provide succour to many with his knowledge of manthras and native medicines.

I had observed him closely. He would come to Utthamadánapuram off and on and spend a few days. He would be besieged by throngs of people. Would explain astrological details to one; would utter manthra incantations to another; would advise a third on medical treatment. Would conduct discourses during the evenings; would cook his own meal; would not eat in other people's houses.

A school stands today on the western bank of Utthamadánapuram tank. He had set up an *áshram* there and was practising yoga exercises. Every morning he would don the special yogic garb, plant his forearm on a Yoga staff and settle down for Yoga routine. Would be frozen in the posture for hours. Anyone observing him during his noon poojá would remain transfixed.

He lived like a bird joyously winging its way in the skyscape. Had no wife, no children. Was not assailed by any sense of loss on this account. This clearly marked him as a yogi. He lived till his seventies. Not a strand of grey hair till his death.

Tamil Scholars:

Amongst my relatives there were a few Tamil scholars. My grandfather's father-in-law, Odhavaneswara Iyer, was well-versed in ancient Tamil literary and grammatical texts. Was also familiar with music. Had the ability to conduct discourses in Tamil. Would often go on visits to places like Puduchery, conduct discourses on devotional texts such as Thiruviláiyádal, Kambarámáyaná and Maháratha and re-

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turn home with gifts from the villagers.

There was a scholar by name Lingappa Iyer in Utthamadánapuram. He was well-versed in Tamil. Had the ability to compose poetry; had proficiency in music; had a reputation to conduct discourses on Kambarámáyaná.

He had composed a number of *keerthanás* in Tamil. He had even composed and staged a play in the Kuravanji genre on Lord Subramanya in Swámimalai near Kumbakonam. He had also composed a number of keerthanás on Sri Anandavalli and Mahá Ganapathi of the Utthamadánapuram temple. I had heard his sons and other devotees sing those keerthanás those days. Unfortunately none of those keerthanás is available today.

Many scholars well-versed in music and poesy had composed a large number of keerthanás in Tamil. In the absence of those who sing and of those who appreciate these pieces, these keerthanás have all disappeared. Thousands of Tamil keerthanás were once prevalent. These pieces were beautifully aligned to the rhythms of many *Karnátic music rágás*. What I had heard and savoured have all disappeared without a trace today. People do dare to assert that there are no keerthanás in Tamil. All these changes occurred only over the past sixty and odd years. Lingappa Iyer's keerthanás had also been got caught in this maelstrom and disappeared.

Lingappa Iyer had two sons: Seshu Iyer and Sáminátha Iyer. Like their father they were also well trained in Tamil and music and in delivering discourses. They used to eke out a living conducting discourses on Arunáchala Kavi's Rámáyana keerthanás, travelling from place to place. They used to intersperse their discourses with musical rendition of verses from Kambarámáyaná, and regale their audience.

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Their melodious voice, the structure of Arunáchala Kavi's Rámáyana keerthanás and the depth of meaning of Kambarámáyaná verses used to capture the hearts of the listeners.

The people those days used to be attracted to the Puránic stories and to Rámáyaná, Bháratha and Bhágavatha. Many scholars were involved in musical rendition of *Puránás*. A scholar by name Subba Iyer belonging to Pambarachutri near Thiruchi had composed Mayilrávavan story in Tamil keerthanás. These two brothers had learnt these keerthanás and conducted discourses in a few places. While singing Rámáyaná keerthanás they could intersperse the discourse with Kambarámáyaná verses. But, while conducting discourses on Mayilrávana keerthanás, they could not have the benefit of verses on that story. But they wouldn't give up. As circumstances would warrant they would use different kinds of verses. Even so, they had a grievance that there were no verses relating to that story. 'If only our father were alive we could have requested him to compose verses and set them to music. Who is there now to extend that help?' – so they grieved.

Around that time they once went to Pooválоor village near Thiruchiráppalli. They spent a few days there performing Rámáyaná keerthaná discourses. In the meanwhile they came to know that Mahavidwán Sri Meenákshisundaram Pillai of Thiruchirapuram had come there. His reputation had spread in that area too.

Having heard of the great savant's presence there, Seshu Iyer and Sáminátha Iyer called on him with the hope of realizing their long-felt yearning. Whenever he met Tamil scholars the great man would warmly receive them and extend all possible help. Even if a person had only a minimal involvement in Tamil learning, he would laud it heartily

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and enthuse him.

The two brothers explained their background. They also sang a few songs from the Kuravanji written by their father.

Pillai: The songs are nice. While I have not seen your Tamil scholar father, your qualities highlight his eminence. Do you also have the practice of composing verses?

Brothers: No. Nor is it possible to develop that expertise at this stage. We have come here to submit a humble request.

Pillai: What is it?

Brothers: We conduct discourses explaining the meaning of the Mayilrávanan historical keerthanás composed by Subba Iyer of the Pambaramchutri village. If we have verses about this story we can add value to our discourse by interspersing these verses set to music. If you could be gracious enough to compose some verses we would set them to music and use them in our discourse.

Pillai: I will do it happily.

Pillai listened to the Mayilrávanan's story from the two brothers and straightaway composed the story in hundred verses in easy style. The happiness and satisfaction of the two brothers knew no bounds. Since then they made good use of these verses in their future discourses on Mayilrávana story.

I have met and moved with these two brothers. In later years Sáminátha Iyer ran a school in Utthamadánapuram. I had studied under him for some time. It was he who narrated this story to me.

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5. GANAM KRISHNA IYER

Krishna Iyer was one of the reputed musicians in Tamil Nadu during the 19th century. He was my grandMother's uncle. His original name was Krishna Iyer. There are three aspects in classical music. *Ganam, Nayam* and *Desikam*. He had assiduously practised the Ganam style and acquired considerable mastery in it.

He was born in Thirukkundram village in Udayárpálayam Taluk. His forebears were musicians. He had four elder brothers. They were also trained in music. Among them, the eldest brother Subbaráma Iyer and the youngest Krishna Iyer attained eminence in the field of music.

During the early days he learnt music from his father Rámasámi Iyer. Thereafter he learnt at the feet of Thanjávoor State musician Pachaimiriyan Ádippayyar. Later, he was one of the Thanjávoor State musicians for some time.

During those days a famous musician Kesavayyá of Bobbili State had come to Thanjávoor. He had special expertise in the Ganam aspect of music. He sang in the Thanjai king's court. The king and other aficionados appreciated the Ganam style of music. The Ganam style was not then in vogue in Tamil Nadu. 'If only someone could learn the Ganam style with the help of this musician, how nice it would be! It would also be an honour to our court'. So thought the

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king. When he expressed this desire in a meeting with the State musicians, no musician came forward to undergo the training. Ganam style of music requires a sturdy stamina and intensive practice. This had deterred those musicians.

The young Krishna Iyer bravely volunteered to undergo the training. He learnt from Bobbili Kesavayyá the details of the Ganam style of singing and the related Chakradáná aspects. Then he went to Kapisthala and started practising, thanks to the munificence of Rámabadra Mooppanár, a wealthy landlord of the place.

His practice grew from strength to strength. Eventually he sang in the Ganam style in the presence of the Thanjávoor king, drawing praise from Bobbili Kesavayyá himself. Since then he came to be called Ganam Krishna Iyer.

For some time Ganam Krishna Iyer was in Thiruvidaimarudur as the anointed musician of Amarasimhá, who belonged to the Maharáshtrian royal lineage. The author of Nandan story keerthana Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár was then learning music under Ramadásar, the palace musician. He also learnt some keerthanás under the tutelage of Ganam Krishna Iyer.

Later Ganam Krishna Iyer was invited by Kachiappa Udayár, the head of Udayárpálayam State and spent the rest of his life as the palace musician there. He also had the expertise in composing keerthanás in Tamil.

He had once gone to Thiruvaiyáru and met the musical savant Thyágarája. At his request he had also composed a Tamil keerthaná, 'Summá Summá Varumá Sugam' in Atáná rágá.

His fame kindled jealousy in a few people. They spoke ill of him to the zamindár of Udayárpálayam and poisoned

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his mind. This zamindár Kachi Kalyánaranga Udayár was the zamindár Kachi Rangappar's son.

One day, when Ganam Krishna Iyer had gone to meet the *zamindár* as usual, he was not inclined to talk to him. He feigned to be busy. The bright musician could discern that this must have been the result of someone's mischief. He felt hurt. He also wanted to convey to the zamindár that he did not fail to notice the matter.

He did not find it proper to express his hurt bluntly. He thought that throwing a hint would be more appropriate. Music and versification were ever at his beck and call. He started singing a new keerthaná as from a forlorn beloved, in Churutti rágá:

'Pathuppai muthuppai vajrap padhakkamum
Paiappaiá panatthai koduthavar pola
Pádina páttukkum áttukkum neer ennai
Pasappinadhae podhum payan ariven kánum'

(I sing and dance
Lavished have you bags of money
Ten pouches of pearls a diamond brooch too
I know what I got
But
Am I deluded by such bounty?)

The *zamindár* was startled. His heart was wrung by the Churutti rágá piece. He knew only too well that Ganam Krishna Iyer could have lived in royal luxury in major kingdoms, if only he had so desired. He knew too that he was in Udayárpálayam, yearning for his affection and not in expectation of handsome rewards. These thoughts were, however, clouded by mischievous words of the jealous. As soon as he heard Krishna Iyer's words, his original sentiment as-

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serted itself. 'What a folly on my part! Have I given him bags of pearls? Adorned him with diamond pendant? What an honour that he is in our court! Musicians from many royal courts are coming to this place out in the boondocks. Is it not due to his reputation? How did I forget all this?' He was full of remorse.

"Swámi! Do pardon me. Out of ignorance I happened to be indifferent." The zamindár implored.

Having achieved what he had intended, Krishna Iyer made a subtle change in the verse and extolled the zamindár.

'Pathuppai muthuppai vajrap padhakkamum
Parindhu koduthu migachugam thandhupin
Panjanai meedhini konji vilaiyádi
Ranjithamum arindha Maharájanae'.

(O King! You have bestowed on me
Bags of pearls and a diamond brooch too
Adept you are
In showering pleasure too
Caressing and frolicking
On a soft couch)

On hearing this, joy was writ large on the zamindár's face.

"Music and Poetry seem ever ready to serve you", said the zamindár.

"Am I a zamindár? Who else is there to serve me? Who else will bow down to my dictates?" Krishna Iyer replied with a smile.

"Here am I. There are thousands to bow to the dictates of your music", said the zamindár. Their loving hearts were in unison again.

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There are many such incidents in Ganam Krishna Iyer's life. Many were the keerthanás composed by him to suit different occasions. His happiness, anger, frustration, hatred and Bhakti got manifested in myriad keerthanás.

My father and his younger brother had learnt music under him. They had committed to their memory many of his keerthanás.*

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* *In 1936 I had published Ganam Krishna Iyer's story along with many of his keerthanás.*

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6. MY FATHER'S GURUKULA PHASE

My father's parting counsel to me was "Be steadfast in your devotion to Lord Shivá". I strongly believe that I have been able to render this amount of service to Tamil and to gain the support of aficionados because I have adhered to my father's advice. While I had not initially realized the deep concern he had towards me, I discerned it later and was deeply moved. My reverence towards him kept increasing.

I can never forget his many benefactions: finding a suitable teacher for me in my young days; shielding me from mundane worries when I was absolutely immersed in Tamil palm manuscripts; and inculcating in me the glory of devotion to Lord Shivá by his personal example. His immaculate conduct, Shivá devotion, purity and proficiency in music made me revere him as a saintly person. His love for me was not demonstrative. It was kept treasured in the depth of his being. I have felt it on many important occasions.

My father's name was Venkatasubramania Iyer; it got changed to Venkatasubbayyar. As he bore the name of one or two elders in the family, he was not called by that name. Sámi became his defacto name. My father had a younger brother. His initial name was Srinivása Iyer. As my father was called Sámi this brother came to be called Chinnasámi

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[Junior Sámi]. It stuck to him as his name. My father had one elder sister.

Both father and his younger brother learned Sanskrit and Tamil from my grandfather, when they were young boys. My grandmother's talent for music was, in a way, inherited by my father. His early interest in music kept growing.

My father underwent the sacred thread ceremony. My grandmother nursed a desire to involve him in the field of music. As her uncle Ganam Krishna Iyer was a reputed State Musician in Udayárpálayam, she thought of entrusting her elder son to her uncle to undertake *Gurukula* training involving learning by living in the guru's household. My grandfather also endorsed the idea. My father was also deeply interested in learning music. He was elated that his guru was a relative through his mother and that he could move with him genially.

"Sámi, you may not have known much about my uncle. Do you know how much of esteem he has earned for Thirukundram and for our family? So far he has not landed a really good disciple. If you move with him respectfully and according to his wishes, you can gain a substantial part of his immense knowledge. His musical style is unique. If you can learn it, you would also gain name and fame in future". So said my grandmother. She must have expected that her son would also one day gain fame and status. Is it not natural for every mother to entertain fond dreams about her son?

On one auspicious day she took her son to Udayárpálayam. She entrusted her son to her uncle's care and shared her hopes with him. Ganam Krishna Iyer asked my father to sing one piece. My grandmother had already taught

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a few keerthanás of Ganam Krishna Iyer to my father. He sang one of those pieces. On finding that the rendition was rhythmically pure, Krishna Iyer said, "Your son has a good voice. You also seem to have taught him some keerthanás. He would come up well".

"Mámá, I have entrusted him to your care. I am not worried about him anymore".

"Everything is alright. But he is not sufficiently sturdy. Should eat well. Should work hard," Krishna Iyer said.

'As he is a relative he is possibly labouring the point about my health' – so thought my father. But the truth was different.

Gana style of music is not easy of adoption by everyone. Only those with the strength of an elephant and the tonal vigour of a lion can gain expertise in this style of music. Ganam Krishna Iyer was amply endowed with the requisite physical and tonal strengths. So he could excel in the field. Musical gurus would normally test their would-be disciples for their tonal strength. But the Gana expert Krishna Iyer looked for physical stamina as well. This was based on his considerable experience.

'Can we increase his physical strength by padding him with clay? Enough if he manages to take care of his present body'. My grandmother stayed there for a few days and then left for Utthamadánapuram.

My father's gurukula phase started. Ganam Krishna Iyer was an exemplar of mental vigour and regal magnanimity. He took care of my father with great solicitude. At the same time he would load him with a lot of work. My father would wash his guru's clothes daily and would also prepare hot water for his bath.

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Zamindár Kacchi Kalyána Rangar used to treat Krishna Iyer as another zamindár. He extended all courtesies and comforts to him. Ganam Krishna Iyer used to ride on a horse. The zamindár had gifted him a lovely horse. And also a palanquin. My father used to say, "My uncle had the horoscope of a king. With his handsome frame, majestic looks and regal demeanour, he must have been born a prince. By mistake he had landed in a Brahmin family".

On some occasions when his teacher was riding the horse, my father used to hold the reins of the horse and run alongside the horse. As a young boy my father sometimes resented his having to perform many such odd chores. He had thought that as a relative of his teacher he would be treated with special consideration; he was upset at the treatment he actually received, so different from his expectations. But such grievance and resentment would instantly disappear. He had no complaint whatever in matters of food and other conveniences. It appears to me in retrospect that Krishna Iyer had put my father through such physical drill only to improve his strength and powers of endurance.

My father learnt music from his teacher with a strong commitment. He would get up early morning and would undergo rigorous musical practice at the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt on the southern bank of Gándeepa Theertham in Udayárpálayam. He would commit to memory the compositions of his great teacher and would sing them before the zamindár and other musicians visiting the court. He also learnt the keerthanás composed by old and respected musicians. He also learnt *Chakradána* known only to Ganam Krishna Iyer.

My father was unremittingly involved day and night in the service to his guru and in learning music. This gurukula

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phase lasted twelve years. Ganam Krishna Iyer's love for my father grew gradually. While there were other disciples, they did not sustain their musical learning. This factor also contributed to the strengthening of Krishna Iyer's affection for my father. The affection that was initially lodged in his mind gradually unfolded and became apparent. He would also take his disciple wherever he went. Would frequently take him to the zamindár too.

The zamindár also developed an attachment towards my father. Would fondly address him as Venkatasubbu. Also arranged payment of monthly salary to him.

While singing in the court in the presence of other musicians, Ganam Krishna Iyer would ask my father to sing along with him. Would sometimes ask him to sing by himself and savour it. Thanks to such thoughtful gestures, my father's enthusiasm and musical talent were on the rise.

Chinnasámi Iyer also went there and started learning music under Ganam Krishna Iyer.

My father approached marriageable age by the standards of those days. Those days the bridegroom's family had to bear bulk of the marriage expenses. It was a practice for the boy's family to meet the wedding expenses as also the cost of the wedding sari and jewels. The bride's family was responsible only for the *Thirumángalyam*, the auspicious pendant worn by married women. Unlike today the bride's family was not burdened with financial worries related to weddings.

My grandmother started worrying about getting her son married. My grandfather's income was just enough to sustain the family. All the land had already been mortgaged. No scope to raise a loan. My grandparents were concerned

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about the wedding expenses. 'Only Mámá should show the way. Now Sámi is not being raised by us as our son. He is growing only as Mámá's son. If he set his heart to it, the wedding can be celebrated', so thought my grandfather.

Off and on my grandparents visited Udayárpálayam and stayed there for a few days with ostensible purpose of meeting my father. During one of those visits my grandmother Chellatthammál enquired with her uncle about her son's progress.

"Good boy. Moves affectionately with everyone. Has been very helpful to me. The zamindár is also fond of him", said Ganam Krishna Iyer.

Chellathammál decided that it was the right time to broach the subject of her son's marriage. "All due to your benevolence. I entrusted him to you with a concern that he could go astray if he had continued in Utthamadánapuram. Your grace has contributed to his growth. He is a tree nurtured by you. But I have one worry".

"What worry?"

"He has reached marriageable age. Should settle a good alliance and conduct the marriage. Thanks to his association with you, he has become a very eligible boy. But we don't have necessary funds to meet his marriage expenses. What have we done to him except giving birth to him? You have been shouldering all responsibilities. He should get married with your benediction".

"Why do you worry about it? God's grace will accomplish everything".

These words were nectar to her ears. Realizing her uncle's magnanimity, she felt confident that he would somehow get the marriage celebrated. With this sense of assur-

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ance she returned to Utthamadánapuram.

Ganam Krishna Iyer knew that it would be easy to accomplish this auspicious event with the zamindár's help. He spoke assuringly to my grandmother only on this basis. One day he shared his thought with the zamindár. Unlike others he would not express such requests in mere prose. A verse would invariably be the vehicle. He extemporaneously composed a verse in '*Kattalai Kali thurai*' format. The full verse is not presently available. Only the first line could be accessed from a note recorded by my uncle. This line is a formal honorific address directed towards the zamindár:

'Vanya kulothaman
Ranga Mageepan
Varisai Maindar'

('O Scion of Vanniya lineage!
King Ranga!
Distinction personified!')

There was no obstacle to fulfilling Krishna Iyer's request. Kacchi Kalyána Rangar agreed to extend monetary assistance for the wedding. Promised to give the money after betrothal. This was a signal for my grandparents to look for a suitable bride for my father.

At this point Ganam Krishna Iyer suddenly took ill. Out of sheer age his body had become frail. He felt that in that condition it would be better for him to move to his native place Thirukkundram. The zamindár helped him with necessary funds and also with rice and other provisions. He also frequently sent a messenger to ascertain Krishna Iyer's well-being.

When Krishna Iyer moved to Thirukkundram my father also accompanied him. He extended all the help and

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support when his guru was ill. He was struck with grief at his failing health. He would sob on recollecting all the affection and care he had lavished on him. He was overcome with grief on his guru's sturdy body getting emaciated.

Noticing my father's grief Ganam Krishna Iyer told him, " I believe that I have entered the sunset phase of my life. I have enjoyed royal luxuries. It is not possible to be always blessed with the same luxuries. To everyone, what is ordained! Not anything more." He fell silent for a while. Then he said, tuned in Pandhuvarali rágá " Venkatasubbu, get the palm leaf. Here is a keerthaná. Write it down.

He started with the first two lines:

Kodutthuvaitthadhu varum perásaiyál mikka
Kuraipattál varugumo paey maname'

(O mad mind!
You'll get what is destined.
Grieve not in greed
For what is beyond reach)

He started reciting the keerthaná in rágá Bhairavi. Having been drained of all energy it was clear that contemplation of god became the only sustenance for the great Vidwán.

'Paduthál pinnalay kooda varuvárundo?
Payarani sarainidam bhaktiyáy thozhindiru.'

("Fell prostrate by disease foul
Can anyone come with you in tow
Dissolve in devotion intense
For god Payaran the benevolent".)

He sang the next part of the composition. His heart travelled towards God Payaraneesar, the consecrated Shivá in Udayárapálayam temple.

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My father wrote down the entire keerthaná. He was overwhelmed that his great teacher retained his compositional ability even when he was so weak, and was filled with grief that he could soon lose him. He wrote down the keerthaná with tears welling up in his eyes. Even thereafter, just two days prior to his passing away, Ganam Krishna Iyer composed a keerthaná in honour of the great dancer Lord Natarájá of Chidambaram and asked my father to write it down:

'Thillaiappávunadhu Pancháksharap padiyil
Chinmayamái dinandinamum vandhudari sippen'

("O Lord of Thillai!
At your Panchákshara feet
Day after each day
Will I have darshan fulfilled")

My father's instinctive devotion towards Ganam Krishna Iyer increased manifold by the experience of his teacher's last days. The deep devotion encased in Krishna Iyer's heart got manifested then. My father had not earlier observed this aspect with such clarity. My father's devotion to Lord Shivá also got reinforced by this experience.

Ganam Krishna Iyer's life came to an end. Inconsolable grief took hold of my father. His devotion to his teacher remained undimmed throughout his life. He would often exclaim, "When am I going to see the likes of him?" His eyes would grow moist.

Thereafter my father moved to Udayárpálayam under the zamindár's support. The zamindár Kachi Kalyána Rangar was looking for a musical Vidwán to take the place of late Ganam Krishna Iyer. He appointed rhythm virtuoso Sámá Sástri's son Subbaráyar as his court musician.

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My father moved with Subbaráyar with devotion and also regaled the zamindár and others with Ganam Krishna Iyer's compositions. He was also a musician in the zamindár's court for some time.

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7. KRISHNA SÁSTRI

It is difficult to believe these days that a 'family man' could have spent an entire lifetime steeped in Shivá poojá and meditation without getting deflected in any manner and lead a life of internal and external purity. But my mother's father led such a life. His name, Krishna Sástri.

He lived in a village called Sooryamoolai on the northern bank of Cauvery, one-and-a-half miles northeast of Kanjanoor. He was well versed in Rg Veda; an ardent devotee of Lord Shivá. He was also accomplished in Shivá hymns and books of Haradatta Shivácháriyár, Appayya Dikshitar, Neelakanda Dikshitar and Sreedara Venkatesar known as Thiruvaisainallur Ayyá. The name of Lord Shivá would ever be flowing in a soft tone from him. As a young boy I used to be fascinated by this chant, sweet as the humming of a bee. I too instinctively started chanting the name of Lord Shivá as a boy of six. This practice continues to this day.

During my early days the allure of Krishna Sástri's Shivá-chant melody got etched in my heart. Later I got formally initiated into many *manthra-japa* incantations. But the Shivá chant got embedded in my heart as the primary vibration; my first guru who made it happen was my grandfather Krishna Sástri.

Initially he had lived in Áranappatti village in Pudhukkottai State. At age 14, under his father's guidance, he got initiated into Párthiba poojá and crystal Linga poojá.

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Chidambaresan was the holy name of that crystal Linga. Sástri used to chant the name of Shivá one hundred thousand times everyday. Would also perform *Suryanamaskárá* 124 times and also chant *Sahasranámá*. Since very early morning till late night he would be mostly involved in such spiritual pursuits.

When he was living in Áranappatti after his father's demise, his elder sister lost her husband and moved to the parental home with her children. Since then she shouldered all the family responsibilities. The Shivá devotee Krishna Sástri was very sad at the unfortunate turn in his elder sister's life; however, as he looked at every turn in life as divinely ordained, he consoled himself that it was possibly the divine will that he should be relieved of the burden of running the family. At this point, he thought it would be a good idea for him to live in villages on the banks of Kaveri and full of relatives, and spend his life in offering prayerful homage to god. As he had no primary family responsibilities, he was ready to leave at any time.

He had no idea of his land holdings. He thought of handing over the house and the land to his elder sister, get some amount in compensation and leave. He shared this thought with his sister. She handed over 500 rupees to him and advised him to lead his life according to his wish.

Keeping some amount for his expenses, he handed over rest of the money to the children of his first sister-in-law living in Kottoor, north of Kâveri, and left Áranappatti. While proceeding towards the Cholâ land with his wife, he also stayed in a few villages en route. The people there respectfully played host to the deeply devout Krishna Sástri.

It was the agraháram practice those days to treat any itinerant devotee as a sacred part of Shivá's retinue. Every

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village had its share of people steeped in devotion and benevolence. People of all *varnás* had profound respect for the devout. So Krishna Sástri faced no problem during his journey. He was totally innocent of worldly matters. Had not been endowed with wealth, power or formal education. His mind steeped in Shivá devotion, his face bathed in divine grace and his benign demeanour won him respect wherever he went. He earned respect with no conscious effort. His silence was more attractive than the eloquence of the learned. The purity of his unadorned presence lent him an allure of its own.

Having darshan at the many temples on the way, he reached Udayárpálayam. Kacchi Kalyána Rangappá Udayár was then the zamindár there. Subbaráya Sástri, the chief administrator of the zamin, realized my grandfather's devout nature, took him to his house and played host to him. He wanted to place him in comfort in a place under the zamin and appointed him as the chief priest in the Shivá temple at the nearby Gangai Konda Chozhapuram. Krishna Sástri found this opportunity to serve Lord Shivá as a divine benediction and continued to live there.

The Shivá temple in Gangai Konda Cholapuram had been established by the Cholâ monarch Rajendra. The temple bore the name of Gangai Konda Chozheeswaram. It was a magnificent temple. Suiting the magnificence of the temple, the Shiválinga there had a commanding presence. The priest had to climb a special scaffolding to perform rituals. With its grand architectural features this temple had historic reputation. It is said that Rajendra Chozha scored victories in the North and made a few northern kings to carry Ganga water to the south, and this gave him the special title Gangai Konda Chozhan (The Chozhá who conquered Ganges). After his northern conquest the monarch established the Shivá

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temple and a palace there. What was once a major centre in the Cholâ land is now a mere hamlet. The temple has changed in a number of parts and appears in a poor condition.

There is a holy tank in the temple called Singa Kinaru (The Lion Well). Its steps are so designed that devotees have to go through a large open mouth of a granite lion. The monarch ordered that the Ganges water carried by the northern kings to be poured into this well. It is, therefore, called Ganga. A legend evolved in later years that the river Ganges is manifested in that well.

Krishna Sástri lived in contentment in the house allotted to him, and with the income granted to him. His life continued there, marked by daily ritual observances and by the performance of duties at the temple. It was his practice to have his morning bath at the Lion Well. He revelled in the darshan of Shivá's celestial retinue and the sixty-four *Náyanmárs*, all immortalized in granite. At the southern and northern entrances, large and beautiful images of Lakshmi and Saraswathi were consecrated on the wall facing west. He had special attachment to these two Devis.

While he was living in Gangai Konda Cholapuram, three daughters were born to him. He named them Lakshmi, Bhágeerathi and Saraswathi. The images in the celestial retinue and the Ganga of the Lion Well led to these names.

The third daughter Saraswathi was my mother. There was a scar on my mother's chin. It was a mark in evidence of my grandfather's life in Gangai Konda Cholapuram. When my mother was playing in the house thinnai as a little child, she got hurt by a sharp wood-pin sticking out of the wall. The wound remained for some time. The enduring scar in the chin was the result.

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When Krishna Sástri was living in Gangai Konda Cholapuram, a Brahmin died. Four Brahmins were required to carry the body to the cremation ground. Krishna Sástri came forward to provide the service, along with another Brahmin. Two more were required, but not available. With no alternative in sight, they got hold of two persons of a different caste to make up the foursome necessary to carry the body to the cremation ground.

This incident worried the orthodox Krishna Sástri. He was apprehensive that he could well face a similar situation in his sunset phase. He decided that it was a wrong place to live, took leave of the temple official and left the village.

He moved to Kottoor village where lived with his cousin's two sons, Agneeswara Iyer and Gurusámi Iyer. They were both wealthy landlords. Were also devout. Were also enthusiastic hosts. Helped people belonging to all castes. Had provided assistance to many to perform weddings and sacred thread ceremonies. Officials, scholars and dignitaries held them in high esteem.

They were genuinely happy to see Krishna Sástri. "You have the status of our father. Why should you go around looking for a place? You should bless us by staying here and continuing with your daily poojás and austerities," they pleaded with him. Respecting their wishes he stayed there for some time. His heart, however, longed to live by himself. He conveyed this desire to the two brothers. They supplemented the amount he had entrusted to them on arrival, got him adequate wet and dry lands in Sooryamoolai, granted to him a house owned by them and requested him to live there in comfort.

'The grace of Lord Parameshwara has helped me live here in peace' - Krishna Sástri started living alone in Soory-

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amoolai village. He leased out his land, got immersed in Shivá poojá and meditation, and lived a life of happiness and contentment with Lord Shivá's benediction.

The farmers who had taken his land on lease took good care of the land, spared him from the related hassle and extended to him all necessary assistance.

Sooryamoolai is presently known as Sooryamalai. It is situated northeast of Kanjanoor. The Eesánya or northeast corner is also known as Sooryamoolai or the Sun's Corner. The village got its name on this basis. The presiding deity in the Shivá temple there bears the ritual name of Soorya Koteeshwara. Sooryamoolai was no big place; nor was it an acclaimed holy site. But the village suited Krishna Sástri very well, what with his interest in a simple and quiet life. When someone asked him why he was living in such a tiny hamlet, he would invariably reply, "This is a place with no ritual impiety. Blessed with adequate water, grass and firewood". He was firmly of the view that a place with adequate grass for the cows, enough firewood for cooking and good water for bathing was an eminently suitable place to live in.

River Pazhaváru ran north of Sooryamoolai. As a tributary of Káveri, it initially bore the name of Odaiváikkál (Minor Canal). Its name changed to Pazhaváru and later to Vináyaká Nadhi. Near Thiruvenkádu it assumes the name of Manikarnigai, gaining repute in puránás as a sacred river.

Krishna Sástri considered a bath in Pazhaváru as holier than a dip in the holy Ganges. In the vast space at the back and to the west of his house he planted flower shrubs and creepers and also a sacred Pancha Vilva tree. Would collect flowers and leaves and use them for his daily poojá. Would never perform poojá without the cow's milk for *abhisheká* and Vilva leaves for *archaná*. He tended with great care and

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affection the plants yielding flowers and the cows providing milk. Each evening he would personally collect grass to feed the cows. He could well have spent his time by farming his land. But he was not so inclined. His desire veered towards planting and tending flower plants to collect flowers for his poojá. He derived pleasure only by performing archana, chanting Mahá Kailása Ashtothram.

Getting up early morning, having his bath and performing ritual oblations, and performing elaborate poojá _ all these would stretch up to two in the afternoon. Lunch would then follow. Another round of Shivá chant. Would collect grass in the evening. After performing sacred ablutions at sunset, he would perform archana, offer *nivedaná* and wave camphor *árathi* to his favourite deity Chidambaresa. Then partake of a light meal. Shivá chant would ever be dominating the day.

After moving to Sooryamoolai he was blessed with a daughter by name Subbalakshmi, a son bearing the name of Sivaráma Iyer and another daughter Meenákshi.

My grandfather and grandmother were looking for a bride for my father. Having learnt about the devout nature of Krishna Sástri, they set about arranging their son's marriage with Krishna Sástri's third daughter Saraswathi. Learning about this betrothal, the zamindár of Udayárpálayam offered financial assistance and my father's marriage was performed in a fitting manner.

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8. MY BIRTH

After marriage my father continued to live in Udayárpálayam. He got his parents and younger brother to live with him. Later he had an urge to spend some time in Utthamadánapuram. With the permission of the zamindár of Udayárpálayam, he moved to Utthamadánapuram with his parents and younger brother. He was concerned about retrieving the family lands his father had earlier given away to a person on a bhogya or mortgage basis for a consideration. It was a time when the land values were on the rise.

My grandfather had entrusted his family land of four acres for Rs.500 on mortgage to Asthántharam Ganapathiráma Iyer* of Ganapathi Agraháram . My father raised a loan of 500 rupees from one Annádurai Iyer of Utthamadánapuram and retrieved the land. Then he mortgaged half the extent of land to Annádurai Iyer for the loan he had raised. He gave away half the remaining land to his father's younger brother Ayyákkutti Iyer. This left him with only one acre of land.

The income from the residual land was not enough to meet the family expenses. It was a practice those days to

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* *He was the grandfather of G.A.Vaidyaráma Iyer and Rao Bahadur G.A.Natesa Iyer (The publisher of Modern Review)*

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raise vegetables in the dry lands, use part of it for the family and sell the balance to meet part of the family expenses. Even this did not solve the problem.

My grandfather and father were in a way pleased that a part of the family land had reverted to their hands. Even so, my father was left sad that some land was still tied to a debt. So started my parents' family life.

Those days a Christian gentleman by name David Pillai was the manager of Kapisthalam estate. He was interested in music and was also a friend of Ganam Krishna Iyer. On learning that my father had been a disciple of Ganam Krishna Iyer, he often used to enquire about my father's welfare. Noting that my father lived in Utthamadánapuram and also knowing about his family situation, he thought of extending some assistance. He would often bring my father to Kapisthalam, savour his music and provide him with some financial assistance.

The rich Sowráshtra men of Ayyampettai and Appávayyar of Ganapathi Agraháram also extended some help. My father continued in Uthamadánapuram with help from some friends. Then came the time for the *Seemandam* ceremony, the ceremony in the eighth month of the first pregnancy of a woman conducted in her husband's house.

At this point David Pillai took up another job and moved, resulting in the loss of financial assistance from him. My father realized the resultant hardship and moved with his family back to Udayárpálayam and obtained the zamindár's help.

When he moved to Udayárpálayam he had grown a beard as was then common during one's wife's advanced pregnancy. There was a lavish growth of black moustache

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and beard on his face. On seeing him the zamindár reportedly exclaimed, "Venkatasubbu, I am really jealous of your massive moustache. I am indeed sad that I am not so blessed".

Once the zamindár of Ariyiloor had visited Udayárpálayam. He was a son-in-law of the zamindár of Udayárpálayam. He got acquainted with my father. Coming to know of my father's musical talent, he requested him to move to Ariyiloor. He also communicated his desire to his father-in-law, who gave his consent to the move. My father moved with his family to Ariyiloor and became the court musician of the zamin.

Those days my father had the ability to regale everyone with his music. He had a fine repertoire of the keerthanás of many stalwarts. It included the keerthanás of Ganam Krishna Iyer, Periya Thirukkundram Subbaráma Iyer, Srirangam Srinivásan, Pallavi Gopála Iyer, Pápanása Mudaliyár and Ánai Ayyá. He was very well versed in singing *pallavis* and keerthanás and in *Rágá Álapaná* (a free rendering of a rágá which brings out its essential form). During his rendition there was a strong underpinning of Gana style. He had mastered the Rama Nataka keerthanás of Arunachala Kaviráyar. Apart from musical concerts, he also used to sing Rámáyaná keethanás and give their brief meaning. My father's younger brother Chinnasámi Iyer would generally accompany my father during the musical concerts. My father used to know many pieces in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. He would sing with great sensitivity the keerthanás with *Bhakti* content and Vedantic overtones.

These talents won him considerable respect among the listeners. His tutelage under Ganam Krishna Iyer also added to his prestige. As my father had spent a few years with

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Ganam Krishna Iyer in Thirukkundram, he was also known as Thirukkundram Iyer. He developed a confidence that he could take care of his family with his musical talent.

While in Ariyiloor my father was respectfully supported by the zamindár. He was granted ten *kánis* of land, yielding an income of about 50 rupees per year per káni. This was supplemented by additional assistance from benefactors. He led a contented life in Ariyiloor. He won the respect of palace officials and the affection of the court musician and Tamil savant Sadagopa Iyengár. Some of the officials belonging to Kárkátha Vellálar community wanted him to settle down there permanently. With this view they got a thatched house built for him at the Perumál temple Sannidhi Street north of Hanumanthapuram temple. This occurred in 1854.

After my father's Seemandam ceremony, my mother's father took her to his village Sooryamoolai on an auspicious day. I was born there on the night of Monday, the ninth day of Másí month in Ānanda year.

These are the almanac details of my birth. Monday the 9th of Másí month in the year Ánandá. Thiruthiyai 35. Uthirattádhi 39 ½. Sáthyanáma yogam 26 ½. Thaithulá Karanam 16 ½. Dhivi 5 ¼. Around midnight. In Kanya Lagna.

After my birth, my mother lived in Sooryamoolai for five months. Later my grandfather brought me and my mother to Ariyiloor. I entered the new house with my mother.

Every mother tends to treat her child as a sign of good luck.Would attribute anything auspicious and profitable to the child's good fortune. My mother was no exception. She believed that our getting a house of our own was a part of this good fortune. Not only that. Reportedly a holy man

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there stated at the point of his death: "A miracle is going to occur here in the year Ánandá. I am unfortunately departing without witnessing it". Everyone referred to the new arrival of railway train and telegraph as this miracle. Possibly my mother was elated that my birth during that divinely blessed year was a miracle too. But she would not proclaim it as such. She had later told me on many occasions, "That was the prophesy of the holy man. And you were born that year".

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9. CHILDHOOD DAYS

While my father led a contented life in Ariyiloor, he harboured a lingering anxiety. This was caused by his inability to settle his debt of 500 rupees. This resulted in occasional bouts of depression. His passion to somehow raise 500 rupees and retrieve the land kept getting reinforced.

After marriage his family responsibilities started growing. While it was difficult even to sustain the family in reasonable comfort, how to settle an old debt? This thought kept bothering him. As a musician in the zamindár's court he earned respect as also the friendship of many. He earned an annual income of 50 rupees from the land granted by the zamindár and a modest income from the family land. He was not very pleased to get financial assistance from friends without providing any particular service. So he got involved in rendering musical discourses on Rámáyaná keerthanás; this would continue for a few days till Rámá's coronation. This yielded good results. He started getting invitations for such discourses from many places.

At the conclusion of every discourse series, he used to be given a monetary gift. This proved to be very helpful for the family. This effort helped lighten Father's burden and anguish. There was a village named Manaleri east of Ariyiloor. A wealthy man by name Manikatti Udayár lived there. He was fond of my father. He would often invite him

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to his village for Rámáyaná discourse and honour him with monetary gifts. At one point he also agreed to settle our family debt. This gave hope to my father that at last the debt would be a thing of the past.

At that point, my father received help from many rich Vellálás such as Manikatti Udayár. My first birthday was celebrated in Ariyiloor in a grand manner. This was made possible by the munificence of such benefactors.

These benefactors included Allinagaram Somasundaram Pillai, Sundarasabhápathi Pillai, Kothavásal Kumára Pillai, Sivachidambaram Pillai,* Rámakrishna Pillai, Ramasámi Pillai, Muthuveláyudam Pillai , Bálakrishna Pillai and Árumugam Pillai. The palace writer Rámakrishna Iyer, the zamindár's guru Thátháchárіár, village munsiff Venkatasubba Iyer and lawyer Rangácháriár also used to offer occasional assistance.

I was named Sámináthan at birth. Sámináthan was the holy name of Lord Murugá at the sacred site of Sámimalai. People from our village and elsewhere used to visit this sacred site. My family was particularly devoted to the deity there. This was the cause for my name. Everyone used to call me Sámá. Sámináthan had changed to Sámá.

My father's younger brother Chinnasámi Iyer used to assist him in his Rámáyaná discourses. Sadagopa Iyengár of Ariyiloor was well versed in Veena. My uncle learnt Veena under him.

While we were in Ariyiloor, my uncle's marriage was celebrated. He married Lakshmi, a daughter of Seshayyar who lived in Mahádáná Street in Máyuram.

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* *He was the father of Rao Bahadur K.S.Srinivása Pillai, a Tanjore lawyer, a Tamil savant and a friend of mine.*

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This income from Rámáyaná discourses as also some financial assistance from a few wealthy people contributed to the wedding expenses.

My father happened to visit Máyuram on a few occasions before and after this wedding. Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár used to live there. Father got acquainted with him. As Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár had learnt music for some time under Ganam Krishna Iyer, he developed an affection for my father as the musical savant's relative and disciple. Whenever they met he would request my father to sing Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás and savour the experience. This acquaintance brought to my father's mind the days of his Gurukula phase. They would both spend time discussing music-related matters. Both were devotees of Lord Shivá. Trained in *Advaita* Shástra.

Gopála Krishna Bhárathiár had then gained reputation as the author of Nandanár Story keerthanás. Was also delivering discourses in many places on this story.

The Nandan Story had become popular all over Tamil Nadu. He used to regale my father about the incidents* leading to his writing the Nandan Story and related experiences; would also sing these keerthanás. My father learnt many keerthanás from him. No visit of my father to Máyuram would be complete without his meeting Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár.

After his friendship with Bhárathiár, my father used to intersperse his Rámáyaná discourses with some Nandan keerthanás. The limpid style and the devotional fervour of these keerthanás struck a chord in the listeners' hearts.

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* *May be found in the Gopálakrishna Bhárathi Story written by me.*

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My mother has mentioned to me a childhood habit of mine. As soon as I woke up in the morning I would hanker for food. Bread and biscuits were not available those days. My mother used to prepare an Appám snack, place it on a leaf and keep it close to my bed, duly covering it with a utensil. As soon as I woke up, I believe I would toss aside the utensil and gobble up the snack. My mother would say that she could never ever forget to get the Appam snack ready in the mornings. After sometime I would also help myself to *pazhayadhu*, the old soaked-rice fare.

When we left Ariyiloor my grandparents had become old and frail. Tháthá was concerned that death might fell him anytime. He was not happy to be living in a village away from his native place. He lived in Ariyiloor for want of any viable alternative. But he could not bear the thought of dying there. He wanted to die in his native place, surrounded by a whole lot of relatives. Grief would well up in him at the very thought of dying out there in the boondocks, away from the river-swept Utthamadánapuram.

One day he shared his concern with Appá. Already hassled by family burden, father had to face this new anxiety. 'Somehow we have settled down here. With god's grace we have celebrated the younger brother's marriage also without incurring any debt. Can we manage the family if we move to our village?' This worry took hold of him.

My grandfather kept harping on his obsession. This made my father feel that it would be a sin not to satisfy Tháthá's fervent desire during the sunset phase of his life. He was well and truly in a dilemma. He even thought of sending only his parents to Utthamadánapuram. But grandfather had agreed to move to Ariyiloor and subsequently to Utthamadánapuram only to have his son by his side during

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the last stage of his life. father too realized it. 'Come what may, it is my bounden duty to fulfil his desire' – Father came to a resolve, took leave of the Ariyiloor zamindár and other friends and moved to Utthamadánapuram with his family.

My grandparents lived for a few more years after this move. Father used to go to different places on his Rámáyaná discourses and earn some income. During those days, grandfather's anxiety level would shoot up. Father would also go to Ariyiloor, meet the zamindár and other friends, collect monetary gifts from them as also the income from his land grant. The Pápanásam lawyers Kapisthalam Krishnaswámi Iyengár and Venkata Rao, and police inspector Muthiálu Naicker were father's other benefactors.

When I was three I got a younger sister. She was named Thaiyalnáyaki. It is usual for women to bestow special affection on girl children. Ammá too lavished love on this daughter. This child was fated to live only for a few years. Ammá was devastated by the death of her daughter. This persisted unhealed for many years. When I did some mischief as a young boy, Ammá would sometimes chide me and even beat me. On occasions when she scolded me, her words would highlight the great affection she cherished for the deceased daughter. This grief never left her. I was never again blessed with a younger sister.

When I was five I underwent *Vidyábhyásam*, the ritual commencement of education. My grandfather taught me basic alphabets and numbers. I studied for a few months under Náráyana Iyer in a school located in the South-North street in Utthamadánapuram. Later I studied for a few years under Sáminátha Iyer in a school in the North Street. I studied the basic texts in Tamil and Sanskrit. In parallel my grandfather, father and his younger brother also taught me.

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10. EARLY EDUCATION

My first teacher Náráyana Iyer was about thirty five. Had a handsome presence. My classmates and I were scared of him. He was ever fond of using the cane. Any thought of him would invariably bring me the memories of his cane blows.

The boys from agraháram as also from the Farmer Street studied in the school. He showed no partiality in administering his cane blows. There was one student by name Pichu in the school. He came from a wealthy family. Consequently he had unbecoming arrogance and courage. When the teacher beat him he would try to hit him back. The teacher had not learnt that children can't be tamed by rough and tough approach. For him his cane was his sceptre. While all the other students accepted his corporeal punishment, would he countenance Pichu's defiance? He punished him more and more severely. But Pichu wouldn't change his ways. He was later removed from the school. 'Why are we being denied the freedom Pichu has earned?' – some students nursed this grievance.

After his removal from the school, Pichu spared no thought for studies. His literacy level was limited to writing his signature. He had money. What did it matter if Pichu Iyer was educated or not?

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Náráyana Iyer mainly used to teach alphabets and numbers. Then I moved to Sáminátha Iyer's school. It was here I learnt to write. Those days paper had not reached school education in villages. No slate either. Initially students learnt to write in the sand spread on the floor. Then followed palm leaf and stylus.

Sáminátha Iyer knew music and Sanskrit. I had already mentioned about him. He taught me texts such as Samksheba Rámáyaná, Vishnu Sahasranámá, Neethisára and three chapters of Amarakosha. I had committed all these texts to memory. He also taught Tamil and Arithmetic. He was not given to Náráyana Iyer's severe ways. Even so he was not an exception to the conventional wisdom of those days that unless a teacher brandished the cane the student would not study properly.

Those days the village schools were also known as *Thinnai [pial] schools*. These schools had their own unique method of teaching and learning. One can't see it anywhere now.

All the students should get ready by five in the morning and go to the school with their palm-leaf '*thookku.*' The palm-leaf thookku consisted of a collection of palm leaves stacked above a small rectangular wooden plank and held together by and suspended from a string or chain. On reaching the school, the students should suspend their respective thookku at an appointed place. Thereafter when his turn came the student should recite from memory the lessons learnt the previous day. At that point the teacher would be lying down in the house or be involved in miscellaneous chores. The students should do their reciting without expecting the teacher's presence. He would be listening to this with his peripheral hearing. Mostly the thinnai schools

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would function in the thinnai of the teacher's house.

After six, the students would go to a canal or pond, clean their teeth, apply on their foreheads signs appropriate to their community and perform *sandyávandaná* or any other suitable ritual prayer. Then they would collect sand in their towels and come to the school chanting hymns in praise of Vináyaká or Saraswathi. Would remove the previous day's sand and spread on the floor the new sand collected that morning. Those tasked with writing work would write; others would read their lessons. At about nine o' clock the boys would be sent to their houses to eat pazhayadu, the water-soaked old rice. The teacher would deal a blow with his cane on each student's hand and send him away. He did that possibly to ensure that enjoying the taste of pazhayadu in their homes, they shouldn't forget the school and one's learning!

The teacher would appoint the brightest and the strongest student as the class monitor. He could be short on intelligence but should be sturdy in frame. His task was to act as the teacher's representative to control the students and to listen to their recitations. Everyone should be submissive to him. Some boys would smuggle some snacks to him, earn his goodwill, and use him to be in the good books of the teacher! Sometimes the monitor's cruelty would outstrip the teacher's.

It was also a practice for the older students to teach or assist the new ones. After twelve, boys would go to their homes for lunch. Lessons would resume at three in the afternoon; may continue even till seven in the evening.

When the boys eventually return home everyday, the teacher would tell each student the name of a flower, an animal, a bird or a place with a view to improving their

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memory skills. Each student should repeat these names when they came to school the next morning. Gripped by a fear that they may forget the name, some boys would share the name with their parents as soon as they returned home. They would pick up the names from their parents the next morning and walk confidently to the school.

As they had to report at the school by five in the morning, the boys would have someone to chaperon them. Mostly old women would play that role. Scared of possible cane blows, every boy would try to reach the school ahead of all the other boys. The value of arriving early would be known when they are allowed to go home for the 'pazhayadu' break. When he let the boys go, the teacher would administer a cane blow to each one of them. He would gently stroke the palm of the boy who had arrived first in the morning. The second arrival would get a mild blow. The blow would get increasingly severe. Consequently the boy who came last and received the most severe blow would make sure of landing first the next morning. The first to arrive was called 'Vaethán'. It was derived from the term 'Vaetrán', the one who was different and distinguished. Is it not a mark of distinction to receive only a gentle stroking of the teacher's cane instead of a hearty whack?

Sometimes a boy would arrive at the school proudly holding his grandmother's finger, thinking that he had arrived first. But another guy would already be sitting in the school. He would not straightaway be visible in the dark. He would now clear his throat to register his presence and to dispel the other boy's satisfaction of having arrived first. And this boy's happiness would instantly disappear.

Sand took the place of slate for the boys. Palm leaf was the book. Stylus, the pen. The students would learn

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the basic alphabets from the palm leaf with the teacher's writing. Then would follow the palm leaf with numbers. It would take many days to learn to write on the palm leaf. It would also require practice to sort out the palm leaves and tie them up neatly. To cultivate writing practice in the boys, the teacher would write the original on a palm leaf. The boys would practise by repeatedly writing the words on another fresh palm leaf. The original palm leaf given by the teacher was called 'sattam'.

The palm leaves were smeared with turmeric, the juice of dathura plant and charred sweet flag. This treatment was given to prevent attack by insects and also to make the letters and numbers distinct and legible. There was no specific dimensional requirement for the palm leaf manuscripts; would be of different sizes. A hole was punctured on the palm leaf. A string with a 'parrot-beak' strip tied at one end was inserted and passed through the hole and the palm leaves were then strung together. Dried palmyra leaves along with their vein were cut into small pieces and used as stopper or as 'parrot beak'. Instead of this 'parrot beak', a button, a copper coin with a hole at the centre or a cowrie would also be used. At the front and the back end of a bundle, blank palm leaves were included.

There were different kinds of stylus: Gundu or fat stylus, Vár stylus and Fold stylus. The Vár stylus was usually secured in a sheath made of palmyra leaf. The Fold stylus had a handle. It could be folded. The handle was made of wood or ivory or cowhorn.

The commencement of reading by a student was called *Suvadi Thuvakkal*. The teacher would write the text on a palm leaf, dab some turmeric on it, perform Vináyaká Poojá, hand it over to the student and help him read it. The

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Káppárisi brought by the student from his home was offered to the deity. *Káppáarisi* was a mix of rice, coconut slices, sesame seeds and jaggery - a delicious mix. It would be distributed to the students and others. The special day was marked by a holiday for the school.

Suvadi Thuvakkal meant great joy for the boys. Not caused by learning a new book. Savouring Káppáarisi and holiday for the school were at the root of their joy.

There was no school on full-moon days, new-moon days and the first and the eighth days of the waxing and waning of moon. These holidays were called 'Vávu'. This term had been derived from the word 'Uvá', a name for full moon and new moon days.

Every boy was to bring something everyday for the teacher: a piece of firewood, dried cow-dung cake(*varatti*), a fruit or a vegetable. On special festive occasions, they would bring something appropriate and useful for the occasion. During holidays they would also give him some money, called Vávu Kásu.

Each student used to pay a monthly fee of a quarter rupee. Wealthy people would give a quantity of rice paddy on an annual basis; would also honour the teacher on special occasions. During the Navaráthri days, the teacher used to get a special income. That occasion was called *Mánampoo*. The term was derived from Mahá Nonbu or Great Ritual. The students would deck themselves up and come and sit; would also perform Koláttam, a group dance involving striking short coloured sticks to the rhythm of songs. There were special songs for the occasion.

The teacher would take the boys from house to house and make them sing. Sometimes he would also take them to neighbouring villages. The householders would pay some

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money according to their means. The entire money would go to the teacher. It was with this Mánampoo income that the teacher would perform marriages and other events in his house.

Those days the teacher was also called *Kanakkáyar*, the Teacher of Shástrás. The villagers used to treat the teacher with great respect. Would not get upset with the harsh treatment given to their sons; would not complain to him either. In fact, would seek the teacher's help to set right their mischievous sons. The boys would spend their entire early days under the teacher's absolute rule. It was normal for the students to deify the teacher and also to perform miscellaneous chores in his house as occasion demanded.

The corporeal punishments meted out by the teacher in the school were indeed severe. He would spell terror by wielding his cane. One punishment was to suspend a student for some time from a rope tied to the rafter in the teacher's house. This was called Kodandam. It was not unusual for the teacher to hit the student on the legs when he remained suspended. I had once undergone this punishment. It was also a practice to make a bright student mount on the back of a dullard and make him crawl around the other students during afternoons. This was called Kudhiraietram or horse ride. I had once enjoyed such a ride.

This was once the method of pedagogy, dictated by sheer fear. This is condemned as improper these days. But most of Thinnai schools of those days operated only on this basis. The student learnt at least in fear of the cane. He learnt many things by rote.

When paper and books were not in vogue, the teachers had to struggle to improve the memory power of the students. The student learnt by rote the basic things useful

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for life. There were several multiplication tables. Keezhvái Ilakkam(fractions), Melvái Ilakkam (whole numbers), Kuzhimátru (multiplication) and Nel Ilakkam (measures related to paddy). These tables were learnt by rote by the students. These were useful for traders to transact business as also for officials performing their duties. All these calculations were done mentally.

Those days a book called *Prabhava Chuvadi* was a prescribed text. It contained many almanac details such as years, months, days, constellations, planetary unions, Yogam, Karanam, Rághu Kálam, Kuligai Kálam and Yama Kandam, as also Lokas (different worlds), mythical and legendary dynasties, Manvanthrás (epochs). Having committed these to memory, the student can gain the ability to seek clarifications from the teacher.

On festive occasions, the students would go to the temple together. On the 18th of Ádi month, all the old and useless palm leaves were collected, placed on an embellished cart, dragged along to the accompaniment of pipe and drum music to the river or village pond where they were thrown in water. There was a convention to pay obeisance to seven Pillaiyárs on the festive day of Pillaiyár Chathurthi. On Sri Jayanthi and Shivárathri days, the boys would join and sing and visit houses, keep awake all night and enjoy themselves.

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11. GAMES AND LEARNING

I used to play with my schoolmates on holidays but only beyond my father's eye range. If he saw me playing, he was sure to beat me. He was keen that I should be studying all the time, both at school and at home.

My father's younger brother used to teach me at home. He had a knack of teaching with great geniality. My grandfather also taught me, but always peppered with harsh words; would also beat me occasionally. My father invariably beat me while teaching; would also abuse me. Getting beaten was a more important part of the process than learning. My mother would chide him "Why do you keep beating the child? Please stop it". This would infuriate my father all the more.

Along with boys of my age I used to play ball, *kittippullu, pándi* and kite. While staying at home, would play otti, *pallánkuzhi* and *fifteen dots*.

Danger by Water:

I did not know swimming. I used to feel jealous on seeing my friends swimming and frolicking in the canals and ponds. I would simply watch the fun and stand on the banks. On one occasion I joined the boys to bathe in the village tank and nearly drowned in the deep. One elder saved me. My mother told me that as per my horoscope I had three potential dangers related to water. The first danger occurred

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that day. But two more followed, one in Patteeswaram and the other in Avinási. Surely enough I got saved on both the occasions.

Musical Training:

Even when I was a mere six year old I developed an interest in music, as ingrained in my family. Noting my natural interest in music, my uncle taught me Sarali Varisai, a rudimentary exercise in the seven notes. Listening to my father and his brother singing, I would also try to sing likewise.

Drawing Skill:

I also had a natural inclination towards drawing. I learnt to cut paper and try to fashion different shapes of flowers. Would also draw many kinds of animals and birds - like a swan, like an elephant. Also pictures of gods. Whenever I visited temples, my mind will be drawn to the pictures there; would observe them closely.

I learnt many Puránic stories, thanks to the night discourses in the village and also supplemented by my uncle's teaching. Backed by this knowledge, I developed a sensitivity to understand and appreciate the pictures in the temples.

Once my father took me and my mother to Swámimalai. We went to the temple and had a darshan. The supporting pillars in the temple had many lovely carvings on them. My father and I observed them along with others. In one carving an elderly person was respectfully standing. A child was seated nearby. My father was looking at it closely, wondering what it signified. Observing it, I ventured to tell him, " Does this possibly signify Subramanya teaching Parama Shivá?" My father was overjoyed. He hugged me proudly. The main myth governing the Swámimalai temple

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is Lord Murugá teaching his father Shivá.

There were two flower gardens in Utthamadánapuram. Some boys and I used to go there and collect sacred leaves and flowers for poojás in our houses.

Grandfather's Counsel:

Occasionally my mother used to take me to her parental home in Sooryamoolai. On the way we would stop in Thyágasamudram and Kottoor, the places where her elder sister and younger sister lived. While at Sooryamoolai, I was struck by the devout ritual observances and Shivá poojá performed by my grandfather and also by his tranquil poise. This inculcated in me a veneration for him. He would have his lunch at two in the afternoon after completing his poojá; I would then join him for lunch. A nameless bliss would overtake me; a transformation would touch me. This was caused by a feeling that I was partaking of divine grace. His sheer purity used to overwhelm me.

His Shivá chant during early mornings, afternoons and nights would fall on my ears. Ever so gradually it occupied a place in my heart. During my spare time, I also started chanting Shivánámá (name).

When I was chanting Shivánámá one day, my grandfather Krishna Sástrigal noted it and was surprised. He developed a fondness towards me. He immediately taught me the sixteen slokás of *Mrithyunjaya Stotrá*. He narrated to me the Puránic story of Markandeya attaining immortality by chanting this mantra. "My child, chant these mantrás, one sloka after the other, after sunset everyday, and pay obeisance to the great Lord. This would bring you well-being and long life". I started practising it daily. For a few years now I am only chanting the slokás.

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English Alphabets:

During my childhood days, English learning had not reached the villages. English was being taught only in a few schools in towns and cities. Those who knew English commanded immense respect. Even those with half-baked English knowledge could easily land good jobs. Only Tamil letters and numerals were taught in the village schools. That was what I learnt as a boy.

When we were in Utthamadánapuram, Sáminátha Iyer was my teacher. A relative of his used to visit him often. Sivaswámi Iyer was his name. He knew English. Whenever he came my teacher would request him to teach me English letters. I learnt that and also English numerals.

When I learnt English letters, my pride knew no bounds. There was an aura about those letters. It was common those days for a person to be overly satisfied and proud on knowing English letters and being able to sign one's name in English.

Sivaswámi Iyer who had taught me English letters, later became an official in Thiruvanandapuram State.

The demise of grandparents:

When I was in my sixth year, my grandmother became very sick. She passed away during the Vaikási month in Rowdhri year (1860). Exactly a year later, during the Vaikási month of Dhunmathi year (1861) my grandfather too passed away. Both of them had been old and frail. Fortunately grandmother departed earlier. It is our custom to consider it a great good fortune for a woman to die as a *sumangali*, i.e., when her husband is still alive. My grandmother's death was lauded as something reputable. The village folks said, "Blessed indeed was she. She left this world

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with *Thâli*, *Manjal* (Turmeric) and *Kungumam* (the auspicious marks of a sumangali)."

When my grand father died, my father performed all the ritual ceremonies in a fitting manner. The death of his mother and father had meant considerable expenditure for him. Saint Pattinathár had said, '*Anna vicháram aduvae vicháram adu ozhindál sonna vicháram tholaiyá vicháram.*'(Worry about food is worry primary / Overcome it / Still worry about money is worry constant'). My father's predicament exemplified this. In between his chasing resources to sustain his family, he was saddled with these special additional expenditures. This left him in a fix. He had moved to Utthamadánapuram only to satisfy the wish of his parents. Now that both of them had passed away, he was inclined to think that his troubles would cease if he went back to Ariyiloor as before.

Back to Ariyiloor:

My father's relatives were all attached to him. They were not pleased with his plan to move from the village. Some of them counselled: "You could perform all the monthly rituals here as also the year-end ritual Shrárdhá ceremony, and then leave".

"To properly perform these rites, do I not need money? If I go to Ariyiloor I can come by some money". My father left his younger brother in Utthamadánapuram and set out to Ariyiloor with me and my mother.

While crossing Kudamurutti river and proceeding north, an elderly relative of ours materialized. He was upset to see my father leaving the village. "Entrusting your house to your younger brother and leaving the village is like Sri Rama abdicating his kingdom and departing from Ayodhyá

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with Seethá and Lakshmaná". He had been an interested listener of Appá's Rámáyaná discourses. Naturally enough he could think of only a Rámáyaná incident to highlight his point.

My father's sister used to live in Periya Thirukkundram, and we stayed there for a few days. We reached Ariyiloor on the Aippasi month in Dhunmathi year (1861).

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12. ARIYILOOR MEMORIES

The house in which we used to live in Ariyiloor had got dilapidated due to neglect. Therefore we started living in one Vaidyanátha Iyer's house located on the eastern wing in the South-West street to the north of Perumál temple *sannidhi*.

Our old friends were elated on hearing about our return. Many called on my father and had a pleasant chat. As I was then seven years old, the scenes and events around registered well with me. The places and people I saw and the events I witnessed then lent me a new joy and enthusiasm. For me Ariyiloor loomed as a big town. The zamindár there was the prince of my fairy tales. The friends there were the benefactors dotted in old histories.

Old Story:

Ariyiloor was also known *Ari yil*. Ari means Vishnu; Yil means abode. As it was the abode of Vishnu, the place got that name. Those days the place was in decline.It is common for persons with no current esteem to brag about old glory and tradition. The adage 'The hungry man looks at bygone accounts' arose only to explain this phenomenon. While the Ariyiloor zamin was in no great condition then, everyone spoke eloquently about its glorious past. I used to find those old stories interesting. As those were the first

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historical incidents I heard about, my mind was naturally attracted to it.

As Ariyiloor was the capital of a State, it had its own complement of soldiers, scholars and employees. Every State managed to collect attractive historical anecdotes about itself. There was no dearth of such anecdotes about Ariyiloor also.

Kundra Vada Nádu was the old name of Ariyiloor State. It was also called Kundrai. A Devi called *Oppillá-daval* [Peerless] was the family deity of Ariyiloor zamindárs. As they deemed themselves the supplicants of this Devi, their lineage was also called Oppillá Mazhavaráyars. Mazhavaráyar means the leader of the valorous. Mazhavars constituted a group of outstanding soldiers in ancient Tamil Nadu.

The famous Andhakakkavi Veerarághava Mudaliár had visited Ariyiloor and accepted gifts from the zamindár. Krishayya Oppillá Mazhavaráyar was the name of the then ruling zamindár.

Zamindár the Munificent:

Krishnayya Oppillá Mazhavaráyar had a natural benevolence towards the poor; was a philanthropist who supported scholars. He deemed it his primary duty to extend necessary help to those who came as his guests and also to others.

When Poet Veerarághava Mudaliár came there, he learnt that the zamindár was distributing gifts. As there was a veritable crowd of beneficiaries, the process took long. The poet was surprised at this. 'Oh! It appears there is one lakh of beneficiaries today,' he mused. After all, would there not be a difference between the way the poet thought

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and the way others did? His thought blossomed as a poem on these lines: Would the Mahá Vishnu claim to equal this Oppilla Mazhavaráyar? What Vishnu measured was only three padis(worlds). What he measures could well be one lakh padis (a measure of grain).

This was the stanza.

'Seyasen Kannan inaiyoppa nothann thuzháyaninda
Mayan alakkum padimoonru Kirshnayya Mámazhava
Ráyan alakkum padiyoru nálaik kilakkamunday'

('Is Lord Krishna of lotus-like eyes
A peer of Oppiládavar of Kunrai radiant
Máyan donning sacred tulsi
Measured but three padis (worlds);
But measured one lakh padis (measures)
This Krishnayya Mámazhava ráyan.')

There were stories galore on these lines.

Ariyiloor had a fortress with a palace inside. Those were in ruins. A temple still exists for Kottaimuni, the god guarding the fort. There was a separate army for this State. Even today there is a house called Thalakártha Pillai House ('the Commander's house'). The army chief had once lived there. Hence this name. There is another house associated with Sthánáthipathi Kumárasámi Pillai. These are a few symbols of some distant glory.

Tanks and Temples:

Chettikulam and Kurinjankulam are two large tanks here. On the banks of Kurinjan tank, there is a temple named

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* *In the first part of 'Nalloor Kovai' written by me one can find many such stories.*

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Arasu Natta Pillaiyár temple. There is a story related to this temple. One zamindár was scared of an enemy chieftain.

Somehow he mustered courage and set out to fight the enemy. On the way he prayed to this Pillayár. He won the battle. He believed that the victory was Pillayár's benediction. He had a temple built and arranged for daily poojás. As the Pillayár saved his State (Arasu) from enemy's hands the deity got the holy name of Arasu Natta Pillayár. Later the zamindár also had a tank dug there. This lake was named Arasu Nattán Aeri.

On the southern bank of Kurinjankulam there are temples for Vináyaká, Shivá and Vishnu in a place called Meenakshi Mandap. These had been built by a State official by name Sri Meenakshi Dikshitar. Regular poojás were being held for these deities.

The Vishnu temple here is quite large. The holy name of the deity is Venkatesa Perumál. The ten incarnations of Vishnu are carved in the granite pillars. Therefore this mandap is called Dasávatára Mandap. All the icons in the temple are very beautiful.

There is also a Shivá temple. The holy names of Shivá and the Devi are respectively Álanthurai Eesar and Arunthava Náyaki. There are also other temples here; Oppilládavar temple related to the family deity of the zamindárs, Kámákshiamman temple, Vishwanátha Sámi temple, Sanjeevaráyan temple, Kálinganarthanar temple and Hanumár temple. In my boyhood days all these temples had been frequented by people.

Three sections of Bráhmins -Vaishnávás, Smárthás and Madhvás lived there. Among the Smárthás were many of our relatives. Persons of other castes lived in their own

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respective areas. There were many wealthy Kárkátha Vellálás. They were imbued with devotion and were munificent in nature. The daily rituals were conducted in the temples with the palace support. With the gradual decline of the zamindár's financial situation, these responsibilities were shouldered by those wealthy Vellálás.

During the mornings, one could find near the Kurinjan tank the men and women of the wealthy Kárkátha Vellálá families sitting on the banks after their bath, all purity, and performing poojás and involved in meditation. Advaita Sásthrá practice was widely prevalent in those parts. Many sanyásis had established mutts and lived peacefully there, teaching Vedánta Sásthrás and steeped in meditation. The peace on their faces reflected their inner poise.

There were a few flower gardens in Ariyiloor; also a few small wooded areas. A feast for my eyes. I do not derive that old joy even when I witness the lush fields and bunds of Thanjávoor blessed by the Káveri waters. I still treasure the beautiful scenes of my early boyhood.

Krishna Vádyár:

After reaching Ariyiloor, Krishna Vádyár was my first teacher. He used to conduct his school in the Pillayár temple on Vellálá Street north of the Pillayár temple. I studied under him for one year.

Krishna Vádyár was an old man. Many boys studied under him. He was well acquainted with Tamil literature. I had learnt *Áthichoodi, Moodurai, Sathakás such as Manavála Náráyána Sathaka, Rathnasabhápathi Málai, Náladiár, Kurall* as also basic Arithmetic. At that young age it was not possible to fully absorb the meaning of the works like Náladiár and Kural. But Krishna Vádyár would compel

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his students to commit those verses to memory. We honed our handwriting skill too by using stylus on palm leaves and writing on coarse hand-made paper with reed pens. If the handwriting was not good the teacher used to whack us on the thumb. No wonder anyone who learnt under him developed a good handwriting.

I managed to memorize all the works learnt under him. My father also would enquire about the lessons on a daily basis. Everyday I should memorize five verses and recite to him. Otherwise punishment followed.

The Elusive Telugu:

My father always nursed a concern about my education. He also thought of training me in the field of music. The musicians of those days had good training in Telugu. They used to sing keerthanás in Tamil, Telugu and Sánskrit.

As Telugu would be useful for musical training, my Father shifted me from the Krishna Vádyár school to another school. This school functioned in Kámákshiamman temple, south of Perumál temple. A staunch Saivite by name Muthuveláyuda Pandáram was running the school. He also taught Telugu. Under him I learnt multiplication as also a few minor texts such as Vemanna Sathakam and Ramadása Sathakam.

My mind refused to get drawn to Telugu as it did towards music and Tamil. This left my father unhappy. "You are good for nothing; not even as a cook's helper", he would chide me. I was hurt by his remarks. But, what could I do? I sure was interested in studies. Tamil and music gave me joy. I could not find that joy in Telugu. From the beginning, I had a feeling that Telugu and I were not made for each other. I did not wantonly hate it.

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Realizing that learning Telugu could raise problems, father stopped me from school. He started teaching me Sathakás and other texts at home. If I showed any trace of fatigue he would punish me severely. I was pained by his punishments; looking at my anguish my mother also was filled with sadness.

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13. TAMIL AND MUSIC

As directed by my father, I stopped going to school and started learning in the house itself. Telugu and Sánskrit parted from me and travelled afar.

Driven by a concern that I should not end up as a good-for-nothing fellow, father wanted me to learn something which would enable me to earn a living. Accordingly he entrusted me to one Thillai Govinda Pillai of Ariyiloor and requested him to teach me principles of village accounting. I learnt the subject diligently. I also developed the skill in writing on pads with reed pen. This became my daily routine.

Ordeal by Fire:

Around this time my aunt's son's sacred thread ceremony was celebrated in Periya Thirukundram. My parents and I had gone there. The place was full of my relatives.

There was a musical concert. The musician sang Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár's keerthanás too. He also sang a few pieces from Nandanár Charitram, so popular in Tamil Nadu those days. He sang the keerthana beautifully in Kánada rágá:

'Theeyinil muzhuginár thirunálaippovár
Theeyinil moozhuginár'

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(Through ordeal by fire
Waded pilgrim Nandanár
Through ordeal by fire).

The manner of his singing left a deep imprint in my mind. It also got lodged in my memory. Likewise, by simply listening to him, I had learnt a number of pieces not taught by my father. I used to sing them to myself; occasionally sharing it with others. But I was afraid of singing those pieces before my father. 'Such a young boy is singing so well!', others used to laud me and provide me encouragement.

One day I displayed my 'musical talent' to a few persons who had come to attend the sacred thread ceremony. "Come on. Let me see if you can sing the 'Through ordeal by fire' piece", they egged me on. That piece had already captured my heart. So I sang the piece pretty nicely. My father was listening to it unnoticed. Only then did he fully discover my interest in music and how I had practised on my own. I wondered if he had misgivings that I might give up music along with my Telugu. That day's experience gave him a new hope and satisfaction.

Then he came towards me. Out of fear I stopped singing. "Don't be afraid. Go ahead and sing. It looks as if you can also sing well". His satisfaction was evident in his words and in the joy on his face. He resolved that day that he should arrange for my getting proper training in music and Tamil.

He sowed the Tamil seed:

My father's friend Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár was an expert in music and Tamil. Played Veená very well. Sometimes he would provide Veená accompaniment to my fa-

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ther's singing. They would often enthusiastically discuss matters related to music. His house was on the northern wing of the Perumál temple sannidi.

My father decided that Sadagopa Iyengár would be the appropriate guru for me. On reaching Ariyiloor he took me to him one day. "He loves music and Tamil. Lacks involvement in other matters. I have taught him till now. I am not able to teach him any further. You should accept him as your disciple and train him in both these areas." He accepted me with evident affection.

One important reason for my Father entrusting me to Sadagopa Iyengár was for me to develop my proficiency in music, and that knowledge of Tamil would help in this direction. As for me, the emphasis was the other way. Basically I sought knowledge of Tamil, with music supplementing this effort. The day I became Sadagopa Iyengár's disciple, the very day I entered the sphere of Mother Tamil's grace. Sadagopa Iyengár was the first guru who taught me Tamil which held me in thrall. Like captivating children with toys, he highlighted the beautiful nuances of Tamil verses and planted the seed of Tamil in my heart.

Sadagopa Iyengár's Lineage:

Sadagopa Iyengár hailed from a lineage of traditional savants. Shanbaga Mannár was the family name of all the persons in that lineage. They belonged to Thenkalai Vaishnavite sect. Many of them were good poets. Bálasaraswathi and Bála Kavi were their honorific titles. One of them had composed *Thirukalyána Nátakam* and another, *Shivaráthri Nátakam*. Sadagopa Iyengár's grandfather Srinivása Iyengár was a gnáni, a saint. Well versed in Advaita Sástrás he was also endowed with good knowledge of Tamil. He had written *Navaráthri Nátakam* and *Sárangapáni Nandi*

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Nátakam. The family name of Shanbaga Mannár nearly replaced his given name. Having learnt Veda Sástrás under his feet, many ascetics had established mutts in a number of places in Thiruchiráppalli district and led tranquil life there. He had also set up a mutt in Ariyiloor and taught his disciples from there. In the later days, annual guru poojás were held in his honour in Ariyiloor and also in places where his disciples lived. His grandson Sadagopa Iyengár would be offered a seat of honour in the guru poojá and propitiated as Shanbaga Mannár.

Ayyávayyangár:

Shanbaga Mannár's eldest son Ayyávayyangár was Sadagopa Iyengár's Father. He was imbued with the traditional Tamil expertise and a streak of renunciation. He was for some time the State Vidwán of the zamindár. He was mainly involved in meditation and devotional chores. So he could not tailor his behaviour to satisfy the zamindár. He did not want to compromise his devotion to the Lord for a mere mess of pottage. Eventually he gave up the zamin employment and dedicated himself solely to the service of the Lord.

He used to worship Narasingamoorthy in the Dasávathára Mandap in the Ariyiloor Perumál temple. Resigning from the palace employment gave him a feeling of liberation from prison. He even felt sad that he had not taken this step earlier.

'Vanja márum manatharai kávenru
Vázhthi vázhthi manadu punnágavay
Panja kálathir pillaivirp párgalpol
Prabandam vitrup parisu perámalay
Nenjam vádi ilaithunon denayyá!

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Nitha ninmala nunnadi thanjankán
Senchol návalar potrálen nálilum
Sezhithu vázhari yilnara singamay!'

('O Narasingam
Flourishing in Ariyil!
Vending my verses in vain
Praising little men
Like selling children during famine
Sore my mind
Withered my heart
Weary my system
Seek do i
To surrender myself
At your feet as refuge,
O the Immortal! The Pure!'

He poured his heart out with his words. Wiping out the blemish of devoting his poetry to human vanity much like selling a child during famine, he spent the rest of his life in devout surrender to Narasingamoorthy.

Ayyávayyangár had five sons. The youngest was Sadagopa Iyengár. All the five were trained in Tamil and music.

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14. LEARNING UNDER SADAGOPA IYENGÁR

Sadagopa Iyengár was of wheatish complexion. Short and stocky. A sturdy man. While speaking his voice was somewhat feeble. Not when he sang. He had learnt his Tamil ever savouring its beauty. Everyone called him Ávanná.

Music and Tamil held equal fascination for him. It is said that those versed in music would derive joy and also spread joy to others. Likewise Sadagopa Iyengár's Tamil lavished joy on him and also spread joy to others. Even if some listeners were not qualified to get imbued with his joy, it would in no way dilute his own joy.

The Teacher:

He had considerable interest in teaching. Up at five in the morning, would perform all the prescribed ritual duties. Then would collect the books and seat himself at the western corner of the outer thinnai of his house. Would be savouring one text or the other. Those passing that way would devoutly salute him. Some would respectfully sit on the thinnai. Sadagopa Iyengár would immediately start reciting some Tamil verse; would also explain its meaning beautifully, regaling those around. Many would seek him out and savour his charming Tamil exposition. He had conducted considerable research in '*Sevvai Chooduvár*' *Bhágavatá*

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and *Advaita Sásthrá*. Was also very conversant with Kamba Rámáyaná. Would recite the verses and expound their meaning and significance for hours. The listeners would find it engrossing. It was like enjoying a lovely musical concert.

A few persons were formally learning under him. He never tired of sitting on the thinnai and teaching them. He would often say: "Should expound even with only a pillar as the sole witness. Should not depend only on a student or a listener. The first benefit from expounding a lesson is the teacher's. The more he expounds the stronger his intellect gets."

"My elder brother Narasimha Iyengár learnt under the State Vidwán of Thanjávoor. He was knowledgeable in Tamil and Music. He had excelled me in learning. I started observing the reason for this excellence. He taught many disciples. He used to question his students relentlessly; this improved their knowledge and also strengthened his intellect in the process. I also learnt the value of this approach. I started grilling my students. Thanks to this approach, I even felt that I had somewhat excelled my elder brother."

One day Sadagopa Iyengár seated on the thinnai of his house, was expounding on some text for a long time. We were living the house opposite. He was teaching in a voice louder than usual. As he went on without any interruption, I had a doubt. Whom is he teaching? Would not that person raise any doubt at all? I peeped out and found that a big surprise awaited me. One Gopálasámi Iyengár was seated in front of Sadagopa Iyengár. It should be conceded that he was merely sitting there and not listening to any text. Because he was stone deaf. Sadagopa Iyengár also knew it. At once I remembered his remark: 'Should expound even with only a pillar as the sole witness!'

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Iyengár had composed many books of verses, stray verses and keerthanás. Though a Vaishnavaite he had a deep interest in Advaitá concepts. His approach to god and worship was always ecletic. He had composed many verses and keerthanás on Vináyaká, Shivá and Ambikai. He had also authored works such as *Rámáyaná Vannam, Rámáyaná Chindu and Jeeva Brahma Aikkiya Charitá.* Had composed *Pancharathna Keerthanás* in five 'gana' rágás.

As a novel measure Trustees had been appointed to administer temples those days. One such trustee did not manage a temple properly. Noting this, Sadagopa Iyengár composed a book of verses called *Panchayathu Málai*, lampooning such incompetent trustees. He also brought to light their misdeeds. The trustees were also then called Panchayat persons.

Joy of Learning and Predicament of Poverty:

While his life was anchored in the joy of learning and exposition, it was also plagued by indigence. But he did not allow frustration to creep in. With the condition of the Ariyiloor zamindár getting ever weaker, support from that quarter also declined. He eked out a living with the contributions from his disciples.

He had no shawl even to protect himself from chill. He wrote a verse and sent it to Mallur Chokkalingam Pillai.

'*Get me a shawl!*

O Lingaduraisingam!

ran the last line of the verse. That benefactor sent him not one but two shawls.

During the evenings he would walk along the market street. He would take my towel and toss it across his

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shoulder. During his walk this piece of cloth played the role of angavasthram. As he walked along, every shopkeeper would stand up reverentially and bow to him. Would offer him a seat and hand over four betel leaves and two aracca nuts in a wooden tray. Iyengár would bring all these offerings to his house. Would collect all of it, sell it and use the proceeds to buy something useful for the house. It was not a big amount. So what? Could at least buy some salt. There was, however, no link between this predicament and his joyous immersion in Tamil. That was an altogether different world. There, he was a monarch. No hunger there. No indigence. No depression. He fondly led me into this beautiful world.

The Tamil Nectar:

Whatever he said he would say it with a special charm. In one session he would take up only two or three verses. Would expatiate with appropriate examples and sub-stories and get it imprinted in my mind. His mind would traverse through the life of the poem and carry the listeners with him. I still savour the Tamil nectar which he fed me in delectable driblets when I was a mere seven year old.

First Lessons:

At the outset Sadagopa Iyengár taught me the *Álathurai Eesar Padikam*, a collection of ten verses, composed by him. It dealt with Lord Shiva of Ariyiloor. He began his Music lesson with a keerthaná composed by him. It started with these lines:

Ravikula Dhámá – Yadhukula Somá
Paramapathi Máyá Pándavá Saháyá

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(O Star of Sun-dynasty!
O The shining moon of Yádavás!
O Lord Supreme, Patron of Pándavás!)

This keerthaná was set to Saháná rágá. I was captivated by the keerthaná and its rága. My fascination for this rága kept growing. This fascination lasts to this day.

Keerthaná – Story of its Birth:

When a poet teaches the verses and keerthanás composed by him he can bring out many aspects beyond the reach of others. 'Before a verse took its birth how did its animating meaning take shape? How did it evolve and grow? How did its final form emerge?' Only that poet can provide perceptive answers to these questions. Everyone knows that such a delineation has a charm of its own.

While taking lessons Sadagopa Iyengár would narrate the story behind his compositions. He had also told me how the first keerthaná in Saháná rágá was born.

Veena Sambáyyar, a music vidwán, carrying a title of Pakshi or bird and belonging to Mysore State once visited Ariyiloor. He was a Veená maestro. A devotee of Lord Shivá. Performed elaborate Shiva poojás. At the end of the poojá he would dissolve himself in devotion, playing in Veená a few devotional hymns. Many would eagerly be waiting to listen to these keerthanás played by him with intense involvement.

Sadagopa Iyengár had gone to have a darshan of this poojá. He was drawn to Sámbayyar on witnessing his devotion and poojá routine. At the end of the poojá, Sámbayyar started playing on the Veená. He did an álápaná elaboration of Sahána rága. Sadagopa Iyengár got totally immersed in the *álápaná*.

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He started the pallavi refrain: "*Mahádevá... Mahádevá...*". The pallavi did not have a range of meanings to carry the listener in different directions. All it had was the holy name of the Lord. The rága itself had its intrinsic sweetness; the merging of the sheer purity of the divine name with the melody lent a layer of additional charm over the original charm. The confluence of Sahána rága, Mahádeva Sabdha and the Veena melody simply transported the listener's mind to the ethereal realm of the Shiva bliss. Then came a keerthaná steeped in bhakti and suffused with melody flowing from the depth of his being:

"*Shankara Shankara Shankara Shankara*
Shankara Shankara Shankara Shankara
Mahádevá..."

The rágá and the 'náma sabdha' scaled new heights. Sadagopa Iyengár got soaked in this bliss and floated in an ecstatic realm bathed in melody and bhakti. It took him some time to descend from that lofty height. Eyes filled with tears he paid obeisance to Sámbayyar.

This experience would not leave him in peace. The Sahána rágá and the tune of the keerthaná remained green in his mind. He also composed a keerthaná in that tune. That was the song '*Ravikula Dhámanae*'.

After narrating this story, he sang the keerthaná. While singing, old memories came back to him. His eyes grew moist. The gleam in his face underlined that his mind was even then savouring the melody of Sámbayyar's Veena. Sadagopa Iyengár used to say "Music is a divine art. It is not easy to embrace it totally. I found in Sámbayyar that this art finds its fulfilment when it merges with bhakti."

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Other Lessons:

I learnt many other keerthanás from Sadagopa Iyengár. I learnt Tamil works such as *Thiruvenkatathandháthi* and *Thiruvenkatamálai*. While at home, I committed to memory the twelve sections of the grammatical work Chudamani Nigandu and ethical works such as *Manavála Náráyana Shatakam* (a poem of 100 verses), *Arappálleswara Shatakam, Kumaresa Shatakam, Rathnasabhápathimálai, Govinda Shatakam and Neethivennbá*, and also the maxims in the grammatical work *Nannool*. I used to recite these works before my father.

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15. KUNNAM CHIDAMBARAM PILLAI

While at Ariyiloor I learnt a number of works, and at the same time developed increased interest in games. The type of games changed according to my age. I used to play with my friends inside the Perumál temple as also in the yard in front. I would fly the kite, tie its string in the *Garuda Sthamba* (mast) outside the temple and enjoy the sight of the kite floating in the sky. Would scale the temple tower and tie the kite's string there. My friends and I would play the game of 'hide and seek'. I would hide myself in the nooks and crannies of the temple.

There was a cranny west of Vámanamoorthy statue in the *Dasávatára* Mandap. Once I hid myself in that cranny. It was very narrow. However hard and long they tried, my friends could not find me out. They started searching in other places. At that point I came out of my refuge and called them out. I felt somewhat proud that they could not locate me. When they asked where I had been hiding, I did not oblige them with an answer. It occurred to me that it could be a safe and sure place for hiding in future.

A few years ago I had visited Ariyiloor once. I enjoyed seeing the places associated with my boyhood. A few esteemed persons had also accompanied me. I took them to the Dasávatára Mandap. I looked intently at the cranny near

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the Vámanamoorthy idol, the safe hiding place of my boyhood. 'How did I manage to hide myself in such a narrow space?' I was filled with surprise and a vague fear. One of the friends asked me what was special about that place.

There was no sculpture there; nor was there any special architectural feature. They could see nothing new or exciting there. Not so for me. That day I saw myself there. Saw the pranks of my boyhood. After I explained this to them, they also looked at the place with some interest.

Father's concern:

It was my seventh year. My father was performing the monthly funeral rites of my grandfather. The major event of the first annual 'Shrárdha' funeral rites was approaching. He was inclined to earn necessary funds for this purpose. Over and above this, another financial worry also took hold of him.

I was getting old enough for my *Upanayanam* holy thread ceremony, and it was necessary to make appropriate arrangements. All this involved money. My father was confident that he could somehow take care of his father's annual shrárdha. He was concerned how to manage the Upanayanam related expenses. One step up and two steps down was his predicament. The struggle tormented him.

Kumarappillai:

Kothavásal Kumarappillai was one of the benefactors of my father those days. He once came to our house. He inquired about our family's situation. On learning about my father's concern about my Upanayanam ceremony he told my father reassuringly, "Don't worry about this matter. Money will reach you four days prior to the Upanayanam date."

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The annual shrárdha of my grandfather was scheduled in the Vaikási month of Dhundhubi year(June 1862). A visit to Utthamadánapuram was planned for this purpose. Banking on Kumarappillai's assurance of support, my father decided to conduct my Upanayanam ceremony at Utthamadánapuram a month after my grandfather's *shrárdha*.

Upanayanam:

We went to Utthamadánapuram. My grandfather's memorial ceremony was duly conducted. Soon thereafter efforts were underway to perform my Upanayanam. My father sent a letter to Kothavásal Kumarappillai indicating the auspicious muhoortham date fixed for my Upanayanam. Four days prior to the event, that benefactor sent the amount with two Vellalappillai gentlemen. It was handed over to my father. While receiving it my father and his younger brother were moved to tears of gratitude.

My Upanayanam was performed at the scheduled muhoortham time. My relatives and friends had come from different parts: Ariyiloor, Máyuram, Kumbakonam, Thyágasamudram, Swámimalai, Kottoor, Sooryamoolai, Thirukundram, Ganapathi Agraháram, Thiruvaiyátrukkudi, Thiruvaiyáru, Thiruppazhanam, Pápanásam, Suraikkavur, Ponveinda Nallur, Devarájanpettai, Achudeswarapuram, Ullikadai, Oorukkádu, Udaiyalur and Nallur.

The procession during Upanayanam was somewhat strange. No vehicle was involved. The Upanayanam boy was carried on his uncle's shoulders. The procession would wend its way, to the accompaniment of women and men and instrumental music. The uncle would stop at every doorstep. The women in the house would perform árthi. The women in the procession would place in the árthi plate betel leaves and areca nuts and sweetmeats. This would be

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repeated at every house. This occurred during my Upanayanam too.

As per my family practice, I was conferred the formal name of Venkatráma Sarman. My father and others thought it was a good name. Since then the name Venkatráman gained acceptance.

During the Upanayanam realized that I had derived the right to chant Yajur Veda, that I belonged to Vadhoola Gotra (lineage) and that I was a follower of Ábasthamba Sutra.

With the holy thread across my torso I had become a dwija or twice-born. My uncle Sivaráma Iyer taught me all the relevant mantrás. I started performing sandhyávandanás regularly. I always had a natural interest in mantra japa.

Gowri Mantrá:

After Upanayanam we all returned to Ariyiloor. As I had already savoured the taste of Tamil learning I held on to Sadagopa Iyengár.

Once my younger grandfather Ayyákkutti Iyer came to Ariyiloor to see us. At the request of a few persons, he started delivering discourses on Hálásya Maháthmiyam for a few days. I listened to it every day. That work dealt with Lord Somasundará blessing a girl by name Gowri. This incident figures in the section entitled 'Old Man transformed as Youth' appearing in *Thiruvilaiyádal Puraná*, a Puráná depicting the various exploits of Lord Shivá. While narrating the story, Ayyákkutti Iyer stated that Gowri's Father had blessed her with this mantra and that the mantra would confer considerable benefits. He also recited the Mantra. I imprinted that mantra in my mind as also the method of chanting it. I regarded his recitation of the mantra as spiritual counselling and started chanting it regularly.

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Misfortunes in tow:

My father used to go to places around Ariyiloor on invitation, regaled the audiences with his music and collected gifts from the friends there. From the income so gained he returned the funds provided by Kumarappillai for my Upanayanam. His position as the State Vidwán was reduced a mere name and the support from the zamindár started dwindling. The zamindár himself was steeped in debt. Under pressure from the creditors he started settling debts by selling the villages under his control. He also sold Surothriya lands granted to scholars. The Sarvamánya land granted to my father at Ilanthankuzhi also became a casualty. With this, the support from the zamin stopped completely.

In this struggle, my father found that at the sign of one problem disappearing, another was eagerly waiting to take its place. With the support from the zamin disappearing, he was agonizing over what to do next. His concern about my education outweighed his worry about the family. There was good support for education in Ariyiloor; but no income. He was tormented by a worry about an alternative to Ariyiloor.

Kunnam Chidambaram Pillai:

When my father was in the very thick of these troubles, one Sundaram Pillai could discern that my father was besieged by some worry. He was the village accountant at Kunnam situated north of Ariyiloor; he was a Kárkátha Vellálá; a man of influence; my father's boyhood friend. He had some relatives in Ariyiloor and would visit them often. During such visits he would invariably come to our house, and have lively discussion with my father. He was involved in Tamil. On knowing that I was learning Tamil he would enthuse me with endearing words.

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One day my father was having a chat with Chidambaram Pillai. Noticing the absence of the old majesty in my father, Chidambaram Pillai could guess that some worry of my father was the cause of his listlessness. On an unobtrusive enquiry he came to know of the cessation of zamin's support. Also learnt about the family debt. "Please don't stay here any longer. Move to Kunnam. You can stay there in comfort. My friends and I would make sure that you are rid of your family worries. We will also find means to settle your family debt." He told my Father reassuringly.

This was a shot of adrenalin for my father. He gained a new confidence that God would not forsake him. He told Chidambaram Pillai that he would move to Kunnam. Soon after returning to Kunnam, the benefactor set up a house for us and was awaiting our arrival. He was also frequently sending word to my father.

Journey to Kunnam:

My father was reluctant to leave Ariyiloor, leaving behind so many known persons. He was very satisfied that my education was proceeding smoothly under Sadagopa Iyengár. He was worried that a shift from Ariyiloor could upset my education. As education had to give way to worries of basic sustenance, he found it proper to move to Kunnam. He fixed an auspicious day for the move and also conveyed it to Chidambaram Pillai.

The Cart Moved:

Our departure one early morning had been arranged. The previous day we took leave of everyone in Ariyiloor. I was excited about seeing new places. Even so I felt sad that I could not learn anymore under Sadagopa Iyengár. On discerning this, he gave me leave with reassuring words

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"Whenever you choose to come here, you can stay here and learn your lessons".

Kumarappillai had arranged a cart for our journey. Also gave us money for our expenses. The cart arrived at five in the morning. My father and I came out of the house. Chanting prayers, my father lifted and seated me in the cart. At that point the sonorous sound of Thavil drum drifted from the Perumál temple. The icon of Kálinga Narthana Moorthy was placed on a wooden stand and *deepárádaná* was performed at the temple entrance. This left my father in ecstasy. "An auspicious sign indeed. We are embarking on the journey with the blessing of the Lord", he said, emotionally charged. In connection with the proposed renovation of Perumál temple, the temple officials had planned to collect funds from the neighbouring villages. In this connection they had placed the Krishna idol, and performed deepárádhaná in front of the sannidhi. That moment synchronized with my father placing me in the cart. The camphor flame illumined the divine countenance of Krishna Bhagwán. It imparted hope in my father's mind which had been racked by a worry about leaving a familiar place and venturing towards an unknown village. He was filled with hope that divine benediction would bless the life journey to a nameless future.

My mother got on to the carriage. My father too settled in the carriage. Our cart started its journey to Kunnam.

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16. THE GRACE OF KRISHNA

We reached Kunnam around eight in the morning. Chidambaram Pillai and his friends were eagerly waiting for us. We got down in front of the house arranged for us.

It was a part of the house of a Sri Vaishnavaite by name Rama Iyengár. He was a boyhood friend of my father; an expert in Siddha Medicine. He belonged to a sect called Vasishtapuram sect. People belonging to this sect lived in Kunnam and nearby villages. They were involved in performing priestly duties. They were benevolent and genial by nature.

As my father came from Ariyiloor, he came to be known in Kunnam and nearby places as Ariyiloor Iyer. Those people had already listened to his discourses and music. News spread that Ariyiloor Iyer had moved there. They met my father affectionately bringing with them things within their means. The house was filled with food items such as rice, dhal and vegetables. On seeing this, my father recollected with joy the deepárádhaná performed at the temple entrance in Ariyiloor and the benign darshan of Lord Krishna. 'How do I manage if I am forced to move from place to place?' This thought was banished from his mind.

Ootrai People and Others:

Chidambaram Pillai, who brought us to Kunnam was a Kárkátha Vellala. Most of the Vellalas in that place belong to the Ootrai clan people. Ootrathur was a place near Kun-

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nam sanctified by holy Thevaram. The cluster of villages with Ootrathur as its capital was known in the olden times as 'Ootrai Land'. As these Vellálás lived in those parts they came to be called Ootrai clan. Lord Suddha Rathneswara of Ootrathur was their community deity. Padayáchis and Udayárs also lived in Kunnam. They were all imbued with devotion and munificence. They visited the temples during mornings and evenings, paid obeisance to the Lord, chanted verses from the *Theváram* and *Thiruvásakam* devotional texts and returned home. They allocated a part of their income for charity.

Many of them had learnt many noble texts; those who had not so learnt used to benefit by listening to discourses. Even those who were not well educated would treat learned persons with affection and respect. The arrogance and mutual animosity resulting from wealth were perhaps prevalent among them; but, on encountering learned persons they would act as one in supporting them. This situation could be seen those days in all the Tamil Nadu villages.

Heavenly Bliss:

My father and I went to Chidambaram Pillai's house in the afternoon of our arrival in Kunnam. Many persons had assembled in the house thinnai. Chidambaram Pillai and his elder brother Appu Pillai were there. All of them welcomed us heartily. Our hearts luxuriated in the warm smile on their faces. Chidambaram Pillai took my father inside the house and showed him his book almirah placed in the veranda. It contained many books. My father took one of those books. It was a book of Tháyumánavar verses. He opened it, handed over to me and asked me to read some portions. The opened page contained the section entitled '*Ánandhámána Param*' (Heavenly Bliss). I read out to

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those assembled each of the verses in that section in Thodi and other rágás. The meaning of those verses embodied in limpid style and reflecting Tháyumánavar's emotional vibrations, coupled with my tone marked by youthful vigour, regaled them. "Ariyiloor Iyer has trained his son also very well. The son would also rise well in his life like the Father." They expressed their satisfaction. The very day we landed in Kunnam we could enter their hearts with the support of 'Ánanda Param'.

Holy Sites:

People those days had keen interest in learning about the histories of holy sites. The sacred tree, the holy names of the icons, history of legendary devotees, the significance of the Theertha or the holy tank - people there would learn about these and share it with others. They had a pride in declaring that their place was a holy site of esteem. They would also expatiate on famous highlights of the place. My father started enquiring about the high points of Kunnam. I also got to learn about them.

It was an old practice for the people who visited famous holy sites and got devoted to the gods consecrated there, to set up temples in their own places on the lines of the other famous holy sites. The renowned Saivite saint *Sekkizhár*, who authored *Periya Puránam* (The Great Epic) had been devoutly involved in a Saivite holy site called Thirunágeswaram. He set up another Thirunágeswaram in his place Kundrathur. There are three holy sites replicated on the banks of Pennai river on the lines of Srirangam, Sambukeswaram and Tháyumanavar temples. The Álanthureswar temple in Ariyiloor was modelled after a Keezhai Paravur temple of Theváram fame. Likewise, a person who had darshan of Lord Kumbeshwara in Kum-

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bakonam established a temple in Kunnam and named the consecrated deity there as Ādhi Kumbeshar and the Devi as Mangalámbikai. Further, like Thiruvidaimarudoor east of Kumbakonam, there is a village called Vennmani east of Kundram. Thiruvidaimarudoor is known as Madhyárjunam (Arjunam means white). Treating it as the centre or core of the lily-white heart-expanse, a philosophical explanation is offered treating Thiruvidaimarudoor as equal to '*Thagarákásam*'. The name Vennmani is somewhat analogous to the name Madhyárjunam. The deity consecrated in this temple has the ritual name of *Ádhi Mahálingam*. It is of interest to note that the holy name of the Lord in Thiruvidaimarudoor temple is Mahálingam. The Devi in both the temples bears the holy name of Brahathakusa Nayaki.

All this highlights importance assigned in the olden times for temple worship. This situation continued unchanged even during my boyhood days.

Income from Grains:

We landed in Kunnatthoor during the harvest season. People there offered us different grains according to their means: Kambu or Pearl millet, Sorghum, Sámai millet, Rági and Thinai or Italian millet. After using what we could, we sold the balance and converted it to paddy.

Rámáyaná Discourse:

There were four village elders in Kunnam. They discussed with Chidambaram Pillai and decided to request my father to deliver nightly discourses of Arunachala Kavi Rámáyaná. The discourse-series commenced. It was conducted in the thinnai of Chidambaram Pillai's house. At that point my father's younger brother had come to Kunnam from Utthamadánapuram.

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The Rámáyaná discourses went off well. My father was elated by the enthusiastic response. His younger brother also joined him in the discourses. I also sang off and on. Thanks to my practice my voice was getting robust. As a result, my singing during the Rámáyaná discourses became more frequent. It also evoked warm response. It boosted my spirits.

My father interspersed his discourse with a musical rendition of appropriate verses from Kamba Rámáyaná. Those days even ordinary folks had a taste for Kamba Rámáyaná. This made the discourse more attractive. People from Kunnam and outside thronged during the discourses. My father was in cloud nine. The listeners' enthusiasm also grew by the day.

The Rámáyaná discourses lasted for two months. One day, when the *Yuddha Kándam* (War Canto) was on, the stage came for Hanumán to bring the Sanjeevi mountain and waking up Lakshmaná and others lying under the spell of Brahmástra. People were moved to tears at Rámá's grief and his lying unconscious. My father himself had experienced so much of hardship in his life, and he could feel the sorrowful mood and also cause resonant vibrations in the listeners. When grief held sway, out came the message Hanumán brought the Sanjeevi hill. At its mere aroma Lakshmaná and others sprang to life! And the audience burst into applause. They didn't appear to be mere listeners of the Rámáyaná story. It looked as if they were right in the battlefield grieving over the fate of Rámá and Lakshmaná, and cheering the valour of Hanumán. For my father the grief of leaving Ariyiloor was a veritable Bramhástra; the rousing support in Kunnam was like Sanjeevi mountain. Steeped in his own experience of grief followed by joy, nearly replicating the Yuddha Kánda, my father could animate his

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discourse with his own feelings. Himself grieving during times of sorrow and rejoicing at good tidings, his discourse captivated the listeners.

At the conclusion of the discourse that day, the listeners were effusive in praising my father. Chidambaram Pillai and his friends started thinking, 'This Rámáyaná discourse would get completed in a few days. We can't be satisfied listening to it only once. It should be repeated a number of times'. Determined to get our family live permanently in Kunnam, they started making necessary arrangements. Twelve persons including Chidambaram Pillai decided to donate by rotation five rupees per month, recorded it in a palm leaf and also affixed their signatures. They handed over the palm leaf to my father and requested him to accept the arrangement. My father gladly agreed and expressed his gratefulness. The assistance came each month. Supplemented by other incomes, our life proceeded smoothly.

At Rámá's coronation towards the end of the discourse-series, the villagers collected twenty varágans(seventy rupees) and handed it over to my father. There was a wealthy person by name Subbaráya Padayáchi at Kunnam. Thanks to the efforts of a few people, Rámáyaná discourses were held in his house as well. Again, after the coronation scene, he gave a special gift of twenty varágans. My father thought he could settle a part of the family debt with this amount.

Jewels for Ammá:

My father took us to Utthamadánapuram to perform my grandfather's annual memorial ceremony. When he tried to settle a part of family debt with the money he had brought with him, a few elderly relatives stopped him. "Only now you have seen some money. Till now you have not given any jewellery to your wife. Do that first. This is no new

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debt. It can wait a little longer. Aren't you going to earn more? Would the debt ever remain unpaid? Getting jewels for women at the right time is the proper thing to do. What's the point in doing it in her old age? First buy the jewels and with the remaining amount settle a part of the debt".

Those days Thirumángalyam was the only piece of gold on my mother. All the rest was made of brass. As suggested by the relatives, my father got gold jewels made for my mother - Ear Olai, Kudai Kadukkan and Panchakalasaváli. My mother was indeed overjoyed on wearing those jewels. She had not forgotten the deepárádhaná at the Perumál temple entrance at the point of leaving Ariyiloor. The picture of Ammá wearing those jewels and her face bathed in smile, is etched in my memory.

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17. THE BENEVOLENT KUNNAM

When we were living in Utthamadánapuram, my father used to visit a few wealthy persons in places like Pápanásam. At one point, at the request of a few affluent people, he delivered musical discourse for a few days on *Nandanár Charitra keerthanás*. At the conclusion of the discourses, those persons gave him a handsome gift of 20 Varágans. Giving him a gift of 20 Varágans was getting established as a standard practice. With these amounts he was gradually settling the family debt.

Return to Kunnam:

We returned to Kunnam and stayed in Rama Iyengár's house. As per the formal agreement of Chidambaram Pillai and eleven other friends, he was getting regular monthly remuneration. He started evincing more interest in my development. His concern about family welfare had substantially eased. With his discourses gaining more and more esteem, the support from the aficionados also started increasing. Noting my increased diligence and interest in learning, his enthusiasm and concern about my educational development became sharper. It appeared as if he had discerned my special interest in Tamil even as my proficiency in music was on the rise. While coopting my participation in his discourses, he also started making arrangements for my learning Tamil texts.

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Learning under Chidambaram Pillai:

We derived many benefits from our friendship with Chidambaram Pillai. He was well trained in Tamil. He was particularly well versed in some *Prabandás* and works like *Thiruvilayádal Puráná*. I started learning Tamil under him. Starting with a few minor works I formally learnt Thiruvilayádal Purana. At my request, one Muthu Pillai of Kunnam presented me copies of Thiruvilayádal Puráná and Thirukkural. He also gave me a book containing the meaning and commentary on Kural. With this book I was savouring Kural.

Learning Accounting:

My father desired that I should learn elements which would provide me a means of livelihood. He thought it would be a good idea to learn a few aspects of knowledge which would be of help to me. Should music and Tamil prove to be not useful to support my living, he thought it would be useful for me to have some other skill. Those days the village accountant commanded considerable respect and influence. He had a commanding presence in the village. His word was law. No one can afford to fall foul of him. 'This boy has no knowledge of English. How nice would it be if he could land a village accountant job!' –so ran my father's thoughts.

I had learnt elements of accounting from the Ariyiloor village accountant, hadn't I? Not letting the skill rust, I learnt accounting work under Chidambaram Pillai. Father had requested him to provide necessary training in this area. I got to play the role of assistant accountant under Chidambaram Pillai. Several forms and applications would be received by the village accountant to be recorded under various accounting categories. I used to provide assistance in marking rules in the registers and in recording details.

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Nature's Bounty:

Everyday Chidambaram Pillai visited the dry land farms in the village. As the village accountant he had to keep an eye on the produce in the lands. I used to accompany him. While he attended to his official responsibilities I used to savour the sight of the fields. My eyes would feast on the sprouting plants in different kinds of farms and the swaying Mochai and Thuvarai plants in the dry land fields. The Mullai creepers and the Tulsi plants registered their lush presence. The Vilvam and Vanni trees and the Alari blossoms highlighted the beauty of Mother Nature. The accountant's attention would focus on the Kambu millet plants; they constituted the staple of revenue income. While I did move with him, my mind was reluctant to get involved in these accounts. I found beauty at the sight of the Kambu plant gracefully bending its head; beauty beckoned me from the bunches of little flowers winking from the Tulsi plants. 'Kambu would yield money; what can you at all get from this measly Tulsi?' I could muster no such business sense. Both lavished beauty on my eager eyes. Vilva and Vanni trees presented me manifestation of Mother Nature's beauty. These wild trees rising from the ground and flourishing with no human support appeared to have a special beauty of their own.

There were streams here and there. I would be engrossed at the sight of the green plants carpeting the banks. Early each morning I would go to those places, collect holy leaves and flowers and bring them for my father's poojá.

These experiences were a source of joy for me. I also derived benefit by moving with the visitors to that place.

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Charities:

Some of the orthodox Brahmins in places like Thiruvaiyáru had land grants in Kunnam. They made annual visits to Kunnam, stayed there for a few days and collected their dues from the lease holders. The villagers also provided some support to them.

The village head maintained the common fund of the village. The villagers would make their contributions to this fund during harvest and when special functions were held in their homes. All these contributions constituted the common corpus. This fund was used to support vidwáns and savants coming from outside and also to take care of common village expenses.

With such a common fund securely in place, would there be any dearth of people visiting Kunnam for help? When the fruits in the tree are ripe, do bats require any special invitation?

Kunnam was one of the villages with such institutionalized charity. Scholars, poets and musicians would often visit Kunnam, stay there for a few days, showcase their talent and return with gifts.

Scholars Throng:

Scholars from places like Puliyankudi of Thirunelveli district as also from Coimbatore and Salem came to Kunnam in groups, in twos and threes and also as individuals. Not all of them were well trained in grammar and literature. Some of them had an ability to quickly compose verses in simple style. Some of them were trained only in a few texts but nearly all of them had many stray verses in their memory and could regale people by reciting them as circumstances dictated. Some came with a retinue and with pomp

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and circumstance. Some others were modest. They used to get gifts ranging from one to five rupees from the village.

The dress and demeanour of the scholars varied according to the places they came from. The ones from Puliyankudi were generally a pompous lot. The leader of this pack sported a coloured turban and thurattu ear-studs. He held a staff in his hand. A few persons accompanied him claiming to be his students. With a peculiar melody he would rattle off many stray verses. The poets from the southern Pándyá land had a certain ring in the way they recited their verses; the ones from the Kongu land had a different ring; and those from Tiruchiráppalli had a different style.

On arriving at Kunnam these scholars first called on Chidambaram Pillai. They displayed their scholarship in the presence of a number of people and collected gifts. This was an annual routine. They lived as poets and scholars mainly depending upon the munificence of these villages.

When scholars visited Kunnam I noted and memorized the verses recited by them. Moving with them further whetted my hunger for Tamil.

A Pompous Scholar:

One day a scholar landed in Kunnam with his retinue with considerable ostentation. He came in a palanquin. His students and hangers-on was a crowd of fifteen persons. I had heard of the kings of the olden times gifting scholars and poets with palanquins. 'He has got such an honour even in the present times. He must sure be a great scholar. I can learn a lot from him'. I was overjoyed at the prospect.

The palanquin stopped at the doorstep of Chidambaram Pillai's house. The scholar got down from his perch. Soon enough one of his students got out a sheet and spread

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it on the thinnai. Another brought a bolster and placed it against the wall. The scholar seated himself on the thinnai imperiously. Those in his retinue stood reverentially with folded hands. Some stood with a sheaf of palm leaves. People thronged to watch the show.

"From which place are you coming?" Chidambaram Pillai inquired of the scholar.

"I hail from Thiripuvanam. The palace vidwán of Prathába Simha Mahárájá. A poetic maestro". Then he recited a few verses composed by him.

His display, his tone and the fuss made by his hangers-on made everyone think that he must truly be a palace vidwán. But the verses he recited betrayed his true lack of ability. With his discerning knowledge of Tamil, Chidambaram Pillai could readily spot a phoney poet in him. The four lines in his verse were not properly aligned and did not conform to the prescribed '*Seer*' or metrical norms. Chidambaram Pillai asked him, "There are more *Seers* in this verse!"

he other person seemed undaunted. "I thought you would like to have more *Seers*. If need be I can cut down the number". Having said this he triumphantly looked at the faces of those assembled. Chidambaram Pillai raised a few more questions. The scholar gave totally irrelevant answers in a booming voice. A few persons felt that the scholar had replied Chidambaram Pillai's questions with gay abandon. Chidambaram Pillai was amused and also angry.

That scholar had no proper training in grammar or literature. Would palm off some old verses, intersperse it with the names of the benefactor he met and try to parade it as original compositions. Sometimes he would also compose

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abusive verses about those who did not give him gifts. He was also adept in threatening people that he would sing with *Aram*. There was a belief in Tamil Nadu those days that if a poet sang about a person with Aram, that person would soon die. That scholar used to visit villages that were substantially illiterate, and collect money by bamboozling the people there. He must have come to this village too with that idea.

Chidambaram Pillai was angry with him. At the same time he noted that he had come to his village in the name of Tamil and that he had to take care of a large number of hangers-on. He gave him three rupees to cover at least one round of meals.

Looking at the scholar's fury, those around were worried that he might sing a song with Aram against Chidambaram Pillai.

"Have I come here for a dole? You don't appear to have realized the esteem of a State Vidwán". The scholar blurted out agitatedly.

The unflappable Chidambaram Pillai smiled and took him aside. He warned him in unmistakable terms: "Don't think that you can scare me with such tactics. I have come to know how shallow is your learning. I have given you three rupees out of pity and not for your scholarship. If you obstinately refuse it it's okay by me. You have to wend your way back in hunger. I am not the one to be taken in by your ostentation or to be scared of your loud words". Poor scholar! He had to pipe down. He quietly picked up the three rupees and left.

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18. TAMIL LEARNING IN KUNNAM

Many vidwáns used to visit Kunnam frequently. One of them was Kadirvel Kaviráyar. I learnt many aspects of Tamil through him. There was one Tamil Vidwán by name Kumarasámi Kaviráyar in Sárva village near Salem. He had spent some time as State Vidwán in Ariyiloor and Udayárpálayam. Kadirvel Pillai was his disciple. When I met him at Kunnam he was already seventy. Even in that old age the way he recited Tamil verses was indeed sweet. He was well trained in creative literature like Kamba Rámáyaná and also in grammatical texts like *Nannool*. He had committed to memory hundreds of verses. He could fluently recite many old stray verses. He could also compose poetry. Whenever he had spare time he was composing and writing down some new verse.

That kaviráyar once came to Kunnam and stayed for a few days in the village accountant's house. Thanks to my association with him, I came to know the names of many Tamil texts. Whenever he explained about these texts, I derived a lot of pleasure. 'So many texts in Tamil!' I was filled with awe.

Whenever he recited a stray verse, he would explain in a lively manner the history of the poet, and the background of the composition. I would lap up his words, totally engrossed. Each verse was a nugget of sweetness. Without any conscious effort on my part, many of these verses got lodged in my memory. When I heard such an old man recit-

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ing verses with no trace of weariness, I was eager to commit them to memory. If he had stayed in Kunnam for a month or two, my wish could have been fulfilled. But he returned to his village in a few days.

Whenever a vidwán, a kaviráyar or an ascetic came to Kunnam, I used to eagerly hope to learn from them something new about Tamil. For me, nothing was more satisfying than listening to new verses and accessing new information about Tamil.

Ascetics:

Some ascetics had built a mutt and lived in Mádu Vetti Mangalam village near Virudháchalam. Each year they would attend *Sapthasthána* festival held in Thiruvaiyáru. On their way they would stop at Kunnam and get some financial help from the village accountant. One of them was a teacher; the others were his disciples. All of them were trained in Tamil literary works and basic grammatical texts. They were also knowledgeable in *Vedánta Shástrá* works in Tamil. They would recite the verses and explain the meaning in respect of texts such as *Gnánavásishtam, Kumáradeva Shástra, Kaivalya Navaneetham, Sashivarna Bodham* and *Vairágya Sataka*. They had studied literary and grammatical texts only with a view to getting properly trained in these Shástras.

Their knowledge of Vedánta Shástra, their modesty, their composure, their nobility and their bhakti lent lustre to their asceticism. I managed to learn a few things from them.

A school teacher in Kunnam was a student of Sarvai Kumarasamy Kaviráyar; was trained in many Tamil texts and also had poetic ability; was a man of courage too. He helped our household by buying the monthly requirement

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of ghee at his own cost. I had learnt a few Tamil verses from him.

Arrival of Kasturi Iyengár:

When I was in Kunnam there was a wedding in a Sri Vaishnava household. Some relatives had arrived from Kárkudi village north of Kunnam. One of them was Kasturi Iyengár. He was known to Chidambaram Pillai. Chidambaram Pillai told me about Kasturi Iyengár. "He is an outstanding Tamil scholar. None to equal him in these parts. Well exposed to Kamba Rámáyaná and other works. Adept in discourses. Had learnt under a Veera Saiva scholar from Murukkankudi". I developed a desire to meet him and to learn new and rare things from him. I started making attempts in that direction.

The day after the meeting Kasturi Iyengár himself came to see Ráma Iyengár, the owner of the house where we lived. They were related to each other. Many others had accompanied him. They were all conversing in one part of the house. I stood at a discreet distance and was observing the conversation. I found Kasturi Iyengár to be an engaging conversationalist. He embellished his conversation by reciting Tamil verses and dwelling on their meaning. I got excited listening to him.

At that point I nursed a desire: 'Wouldn't he register my presence? And ask me something?' Guessing my desire, one person told Kasturi Iyengár " Swami, this boy is learning Tamil. He has been eager to meet you. Even now he is all ears, listening to whatever you are saying".

Kasturi Iyengár's Test:

"Oh really? I am glad", he said, turned to me and asked me "Under whom are you studying now?".

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"Under the village accountant of this place".

"What are you studying?"

"Thiruvilayádal Puránam".

"Have you studied under someone else earlier?"

"Yes Swami, I studied under Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár and a few others". I also informed him about the works I had studied.

"Oh I see. Sadagopa Iyengár is a man of great erudition. I am really glad that you had studied under him. Come on, let me hear a verse".

At once I recited a verse from *Thiruvenkatathu Andháthi in Bhairavi rágá*. He asked me to explain the meaning. I did so briefly. "Good, good", he said appreciatively. His words were a shower of gold for me. 'Such a great scholar giving me recognition and appreciating my singing. How lucky am!'

"Let me hear what else you know".

It was a shot in the arm for me. I recited a few verses from some Satakams.

"Have you studied *Thiruvenkadamálai*?" he asked.

"No" I replied.

"I will now recite a verse. Note it down".

'What a lucky break for me!' I was truly elated.

'Theyniyalun koonthalár senkaramu mádavathor
Meniyamai yampozhiyum Venkatamay – gnániyargal
Thánkutiyet takarathár thálurarumael –vaithu vennai
Thánkuriyet takarathár sárbu.'

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(Damsels
With hands reddish
Locks smeared with honey
Extend arms.
The saints
Of renunciation intense
Resist the darts of Manmatá.
The wise ones
Repose faith in the Lord of Venkatam.
The Lord of eight letters
Plants leg on mortar
Scoops butter by hand.)

He recited the verse very slowly to help me write it down. He also explained its meaning. Then he asked me, "Now you read it once and tell me the meaning. Let me see".

I was very keen to leave a good impression on him. I read the verse very slowly and explained the meaning respectfully.

Affection for me sprouted in Kasturi Iyengár. "You have good powers of comprehension. Keep it up and study well".

His Promise:

One person in the gathering asked him, "Would it be possible for you to teach this boy?" The vidwán replied: "I have no hesitation in teaching him. If he could come to Kárkudi I would make necessary arrangements and teach him. I am confident that this boy would come up well".

My father was there too, observing the proceedings. "As you have suggested, we would come to Kárkudi. You

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should be gracious enough to take him as your disciple. He has no interest in pursuing anything else". Appá's words were charged with emotion. Kasturi Iyengár's words sounded like a precious boon.

"Do come there. My relatives and I would make all necessary arrangements for you. I would gladly teach him", Kasturi Iyengár said.

At that point one Sámi Iyengár appeared there. He too belonged to Kárkudi. Had come to Kunnam to attend a wedding; Kasturi Iyengár's friend; learned in Tamil and Music; had poetic prowess too. On seeing him Kasturi Iyengár briefed him on what happened. Immediately on hearing this, he turned to my father and gave an assurance: "Adadá, I'm delighted. If you do choose to come I'll extend all possible help. Would also teach him Tamil".

It appeared as if each was excelling the other in affection and benevolent nature. I felt reassured that good days were ahead for us.

"Look for an auspicious date and move there", he told my father. "So, you are coming there, right? Good" Kasturi Iyengár told me and left. The others joined him.

My eyes were reveted in the direction of Kasturi Iyengár. As he gradually receded from my sight, an image of Kárkudi loomed in my mind. My father was more than ready to move anywhere in the interest of my learning Tamil.

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19. THE BENEVOLENT, THE MISERLY

Move to Kárkudi:

Taking note of my enthusiasm to go to Kárkudi, my father took me and my mother to that village on an auspicious day. On learning about our arrival through Kasturi Iyengár, the Sri Vaishnavites in that village warmly welcomed us and started making arrangements for our stay there.

We were accommodated in the house of a wealthy person by name Srinivasa Iyengár. We received considerable quantities of provisions from the villagers. The Sri Vaishnavites there were recipients of scholar-land grants. They made arrangement among themselves to supply our monthly requirement of rice.

Kasthuri Iyengár the preceptor:

Kasturi Iyengár was well trained in the grammar classic Nannool. An eminent grammar scholar Ilakkanam (Grammar) Anna Pillai of Thanjávoor and he used to engage in lively scholarly exchanges on literary and grammar issues through palm leaves. Kasturi Iyengár had written in palm leaves works such as *Rámáyaná*, *Bháratha* and *Bhágavathá*. While at Kunnam I had learnt Mahálingayyar Grammar under Srinivása Iyengár of Thanjávoor. I had a desire to continue to learn grammar works like Nannool.

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So I started learning Nannool under him. He taught me the *Kándigai* commentary written by Visáka Perumál Iyer. And also supplemented it with explanatory inputs. Everyday I used to recite from memory the entire Nannool text. Some of the grammatical formulations of Nannool appeared to be like the craters on the moon. I did not clearly understand the Nannool text. When some scholar came by, Kasturi Iyengár would ask me to repeat some of the Nannool sutras and their meaning. I repeated it by rote. They got imprinted in my mind ever more strongly.

Those days Nannool had a special standing. Anyone knowing Nannool without any blemish was recognized as a scholar. There were only a few scholars who had mastered it and who could explain clearly the subtleties of the Nannool sutrás and their commentaries. Most scholars tended to focus on literature and not on grammar. By my ability to memorize and repeat the Nannool sutrás and their commentaries, I left an impression on others that I had the potential to become a grammar expert in Tamil. But I was aware that I had a lot more to learn in this field.

Kasturi Iyengár had many books in this area including *Navaneetha Páttiyal* (Poetics). I got some exposure to these works. He also taught me some Prabandams such as *Venkata Vennpá*.

Learning under Sámi Iyengár:

Kasturi Iyengár's friend Sámi Iyengár also treated us with affection. As earlier promised he also started teaching me. He was trained in Kamba Rámáyaná. As I had already been assisting my father in his Kamba Rámáyaná discourses, I had a natural desire to learn Kamba Rámáyaná formally. It was a convention to start Kamba Rámáyaná from *Sundara Kándam*(Canto) instead of *Bála Kándam*. Accord-

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ingly I started learning from Sundara Kándam. He used to recite verses musically. I found it very pleasing. I learnt the meaning from him in respect of the first 27 verses of *Thiruvenkadatthu Andháthi*. At that point he told me, "I had not learnt beyond this point. Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár would teach you the entire text; when you meet him next you can learn the other verses from him". And I could not learn beyond the twenty seven verses. I had a lingering longing to learn the entire text from someone.

It was true that I learnt a number of new works and other aspects of Tamil. But this learning was neither detailed, comprehensive or totally free from doubt. It is one thing to read and acquire knowledge. It is quite another aspect to teach lucidly what one has learnt. But such pedagogical skills are found in good measure only in a few scholars.

We lived in Kárkudi for six months. Kasturi Iyengár and Sámi Iyengár mentored me to the extent possible. Their wives were also readers in their own right. They were also very affectionate towards me. I used to write down for them keerthanás known to me and also sing those pieces.

Back to Kunnam:

After six months we took leave of Kasturi Iyengár and other friends and returned to Kunnam. The people of Kunnam, full of charitable disposition, continued to extend to us support and affection.

Thanjai Srinivasa Iyengár, who had taught me Mahálinga Iyer Grammar, had given me a book containing seven ethical works - *Átthichoodi*, *Kondrai Vendhan*, *Vetriverkkai*, *Moodurai*, *Nalvazhi*, *Nanneri* and *Needhi Neri Vilakkam*. The book was published in Puduchery deleting verses with religious overtones; it also contained textual

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meaning and paraphrase. I carefully read the verses and the meanings and committed them to memory. I also managed to get hold of the text and meaning of *Naidatham* published by Vedagiri Mudaliár of Ponvilaintha Kalathoor. As also *Náladiyár* with commentary. With the help of the textual meaning and commentary in these two books, I managed to read and understood these texts. I was able to memorize these two texts as well. But some doubts did occasionally crop up. I thought I could go to Kárkudi and get clarifications from Kasturi Iyengár.

Ammá's Love:

On knowing my desire, my father took me alone to Kárkudi. I spent four days there and obtained necessary clarifications from Kasturi Iyengár. I took leave of him on the fifth day and returned to Kunnam in someone's company. Father decided to stay for a few more days there.

When I arrived in Kunnam Ammá was chatting with a few women. On seeing me, she said with tears in her eyes, "My child, since you went to Kárkudi I have hardly eaten; no sleep either. My thoughts are full of you". She expressed her longing.

Till then she had never been separated from me. I was about twelve then. While others found me a bright boy, I was still a child in Ammá's eyes. She used to apply oil on me during the bi-weekly oil bath ritual, and also feed me fondly. She thought her entire life was designed to protect me and delight in my development. How pure is a mother's love! Motherly affection with no trace of selfishness, has a divine quality to it.

When my mother hugged me and expressed her anguish of separation, the women around could not help break

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into laughter. I was lost in surprise, not knowing what was happening. My father returned to Kunnam after a few days.

Off to Vennmani:

When we were in Kunnam, a few wealthy persons from Vennmani east of Kunnam had taken us there. As desired by them, my father delivered Arunachala Kaviráyar Rámáyaná discourses there. On completion he was given twenty varágans as gift.

Amirda Kaviráyar:

One Amirda Kaviráyar visited Vennmani one day. He was about seventy then. He had learnt a few texts from Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár and his father. While he had not learnt many texts, he had a deep understanding of the texts he had learnt and a capacity to explain their meaning in a lucid manner. He was also trained in music. It was a delight to hear him recite verses marked by musical melody. I had seen him even when I was in Ariyiloor.

He was staying in the house of the village Maniyakkárar, the revenue collector. He delivered a discourse there. During the discourse, he referred to a verse called Akkaravamburai and also explained its meaning. It is the 28th verse of *Thiruvarangatthu Andháthi*. I had earlier learnt the first 27 verses with their meaning from Kárkudi Sámi Iyengár. I had been waiting for an opportunity to learn the other verses. So when Amirda Kaviráyar explained the meaning of the 28th verse, I was all attention. 'He must have learnt the entire text from someone. It should be possible for me to fulfil my desire through him. Even if it costs some money I should learn the meaning for all the verses from him,' I thought.

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I rushed to my house and came back with the Thiruvarangatthu Andháthi book. I read the 29th verse and requested him to explain the meaning. He explained in detail. I listened with keen attention and registered it in my mind. Then I read the 30th verse. If he was prepared I was eager to learn the meaning of all the verses at one go. But my desire was not to be met all that easily.

Hoping to learn the meaning of many more verses, I read the 30th verse, stopped for a while and waited eagerly.

"Thiruvarangatthu Andháthi is full of Yamagam, the repetition of words or syllables of like-sound but varying in sense. This can't be understood easily. One has to take a lot of pains to unravel and understand this aspect. Learning one verse here is equal to learning hundred verses in other texts." He was evidently preparing the ground for something.

While teaching a text the teacher normally explains the structure of the text and also about the author. I thought he was only making this point with his remark. I had also learnt from my own experience that Thiruvarangathu Andháthi was a difficult text to master. So I told him, "True indeed. Kárkudi Sámi Iyengár himself had told me that he had a good understanding of only the first 27 verses".

"You see, that is precisely the point I'm making. One can explain the meaning of many stray verses. Can deliver discourses on the entire Naidatham grammar text. You can't guess and venture to explain this Andháthi. One should have learnt from a mentor very assiduously. I had gone through the grind with considerable effort. Each verse is a treasure trove".

'A treasure, no doubt' I told myself.

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"I am old and frail; can I so easily teach you what I had learnt with such immense effort? Can one have the heart to scatter a treasure garnered after so much of effort? Further, my throat hurts. I am off". He left in a huff. I was greatly disappointed. So near yet so far! 'This Kaviráyar could have explained the meaning of at least two verses instead of waxing eloquent all the while', I thought.

Those who were listening to our conversation observed the anguish on my face, and remarked; "Poor boy! He was requesting with so much modesty and yearning. This old man has rejected it with disdain. It is true that Thiruvenka-datthu Andháthi is a treasure as he said. But, is he not the demon guarding the treasure?"

I was hoping against hope that the Kaviráyar would return but he was well and truly gone. He didn't show up again till I left the village.

Here was Kasturi Iyengár who taught me Tamil texts and also extended support to my family. How different is this Amirda Kaviráyar, I lamented. I had earlier thought that there are benefactors and misers only among the rich. Only that day I realized that one can encounter these two types even amongst those endowed with the wealth of knowledge.

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20. TOWARDS MARRIAGE

At the conclusion of the Rámáyaná discourses in Vennmani we returned to Kunnam. That village was our primary support base. The village accountant Chidambaram Pillai and his friends reinforced our attachment to Kunnam with their benevolence.

Chidambaram Pillai had many palm manuscripts in his possession. He had arranged them carefully and protected them. Occasionally I used to read some of those palm manuscripts. One day a Ráyar headmaster of Perumpuliyur school had come to Kunnam. He was trained in Tamil Studies. He observed my poring over some manuscripts and suffering without access to books. On seeing me reading a book of Thirukkural commentary I had borrowed from Muthu Pillai, he realized that it was a borrowed book. "I've a copy of this book. Come to my place. I'll give it to you", he told me. I was touched by his solicitude. My attempts to go to Perumpuliyur did not succeed. I returned Muthu Pillai's book to him.

Composing Verses:

Out of my practice in reading *Sadakam* and *Málai* works, I started composing verses by following their rhythm. I could easily internalize aspects of rhyme and alliteration. But I was not knowledgeable in other prosadic norms such as *Asai*, *Seer*, *Thalai* and *Thodai*. I took to singing the Sadakam verses. I composed some verses on Ádhi Kumbeswara Mangalámbika and Durga named Āyiravalli.

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I incorporated in those verses the ideas contained in the works of Tháyumánavar and Pattinatthu Pillayár. 'I have squandered time with involvement in girls' beauty. I have wasted time in such infatuation,' 'I have wandered in torment singing in praise of the rich' – such ideas figured in my verses. I was proud to adopt the rhythm of old verses and also to incorporate their ideas.

One day I recited to my father a few of the verses I had composed. I thought that he would compliment me and give me encouragement. "You silly boy! Don't compose such verses", he said. "Those poets of renown have composed such verses. What's the problem in my following them?' I interjected.

"You are a small boy. They had toiled through the grind of life. It is not proper for you to be saying what they had said. 'I have suffered due to infatuation with women' – they could say that; can you?" He asked.

I could not then understand the import of Appá's reproach. I did not realize that my verses should reflect my own lived experiences. I had not reached the age of getting infatuated with girls; I did not understand that in this context my verses involving an element of renunciation lacked authenticity. They had sung; so did I. All I did was to make marginal changes in the ideas contained in their verses. I had not attempted to think deeply, give vent to imagination and incorporate an idea in my verses. I would keep reciting the verses I had composed and be very elated. I also nursed an element of pride.

Worry about Marriage:

My father kept observing the gradual progress in my learning. Thoughts about me kept dominating him. While he was putting in efforts towards my education, he also

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started thinking about my marriage. The practice of completing marriages for both boys and girls at an early age was then widely prevalent. It was considered a dishonour if marriage was not celebrated within a certain age.

I was then in my thirteenth year. Father already started worrying about my marriage. Those days looking for a bridegroom for a girl was not the norm. The reverse was the case. 'Oh! The girl is growing in years!' – the parents were not seized of this worry. 'Some boy from somewhere will sure materialize and marry her' – they had this self-assurance. But, the boy's parents would be concerned to find a good girl and have the son's marriage performed in good time.

In this social mileau, my father too started searching for a suitable girl for me. Then, the boy's family used to bear the brunt of marriage expenses. With the support he had received in Kunnam, my father had earlier been keen to settle the family debt. That attitude underwent a change. 'The debt can be settled even by selling the land. I should somehow perform his wedding. I should be saving money for that purpose'. This thought started dominating him. Two efforts ran in parallel: searching for a bride; and looking for funds for the marriage. His younger brother also joined him in this effort.

Move to Kalathoor:

One Rama Iyengár of Kalathoor in Perumpuliyur taluk used to visit Kunnam frequently. He was related to our house owner; a Surothriyádar, owning 'scholar-grant' land; an influential person; and trained in Tamil. My father and he got to know each other and became friends. That gentleman could discern my father's worry about my marriage. "If you come to Kalathoor, favourable conditions would emerge for

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the wedding. No need for you to be overly concerned about money." He invited us to Kalathoor. My father felt that it was god's grace that whenever we faced difficulties, help was forthcoming from unexpected quarters. He accepted the invitation.

A few days after he reached his village, Rama Iyengár sent a carriage to Kalathoor to take us to his village. We reached Kalathoor, with my uncle and aunt accompanying us.

Rama Iyengár was a man of wealth. He had a large storeyed house. He vacated and tidied up a part of the house for us. We stayed there. All conveniences were made available to us.

Kalathoor's Topography:

Kalathoor was on the banks of Vada Velláru, a perennial river. Peopled by persons from different communities. Muslim families tended betel gardens and lived in comfort. Some of them were trained in Tamil texts. There was an agraháram in the village. Vaishnavites, Mádhwás, Telugu Brahmins and Tamil Smárthás were the Brahmin sects in the village. Of the Shiva and Vishnu temples, the Vishnu temple was famous. There were also temples for deities like Durga. Flower gardens and groves dotted the village.

A hill fort named Ranjanagadidurgam lay outside Kalathoor. It was said that a nawab used to live there. Lands and a large grove owned by him were found in Kalathoor. The grove was full of many fruit trees and flower plants.

Kalathoor and the fort nearby were full of lovely sights. They filled me with a delight I had not experienced earlier. I used to visit the fort and admire its structure and also appreciate the beauty of the gardens in Kalathoor. I would meet

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the Muslims there with Tamil learning, converse with them and delight in the verses they recited. Though belonging to a different religion they were involved in the beauty of Tamil, committed many Tamil verses to memory, enjoyed their beauty and shared their pleasure with others.

As Thuraimangalam Sivaprakása Swámigal had travelled in those parts, there were many stories about that savant. People there respected his works and studied them. Though he was a staunch Saivite, the Muslim Tamil aficionados did not fail to respect his works. They studied with interest the verses of Masthán Sáhib and also *Seeráppuránam*. Likewise they also learnt with devotion *Kamba Rámáyaná*, *Thiruvilaiyádal* and *Prabu Linga Leelai*. So I got involved with them.

Rámáyaná Discourse:

While at Kalathoor, we had access to a whole range of facilities. At the request of Rama Iyengár and other friends, my Father commenced his Rámáyaná discourses on an auspicious day. The discourse started at eight in the night and went on till eleven. A large number of people attended the discourse with a lot of interest.

With his considerable experience in delivering discourses. Father also displayed his musical talent. His younger brother also assisted him. At the beginning he devoted more attention to rendering the keerthanás melodiously, with correspondingly less emphasis on explaining the meaning. Gradually expatiating on the meaning increased. He brought to bear upon his discourses his knowledge of Sanskrit and Tamil. While dwelling upon the meaning of Rámáyaná keerthanás, he also sang other keerthanás as parellels; would refer to many Tamil songs and Sanskrit slokás. On those occasions he sang the first line of a paral-

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lel song; taking the cue from him I would sing those songs. My voice and my manner of singing found good response among the listeners. I could notice it from the expressions on their faces. The joy I so derived would get reflected when I sang the next song. It is human nature to value adulation as a greater recompense than monetary and material gifts. It was no wonder that this sentiment prevailed strongly in me during those young days.

The Rámáyaná coronation was celebrated in a grand manner in Kalathoor. Rama Iyengár and others collected 100 varágans (Rs.350) and presented it to my father. During the earlier days it used to be only twenty varágans. The higher level of remuneration was the result of the musical talents displayed by my father, his younger brother and myself, and also to support the marriage efforts. Out of the 350 rupees, Appá retained 150 rupees for family expenses, and gave the balance of 200 rupees to Rama Iyengár saying that he would receive it at the time of marriage.

Discourse on Nandan Charitram:

At the conclusion of the Rámáyaná discourses, many persons requested my father to deliver discourses on Nandan Charitram. It was a time when *Nandan Charitram* had spread throughout Tamil Nadu. Everyone had learnt that the author Gopála Krishna Bhárathiár and my father were friends, and that my father was an expert on Nandan discourse. Appá used to sing the keerthanás in the melodies set by the author himself.

My father would often dwell upon the circumstances leading to Bhárathiár composing Nandan Charitram, the various incidents which occurred while it was being composed, and would also intersperse his Rámáyaná discourses with Nandan keerthanás. He narrated many interesting inci-

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dents, eg., how Bhárathiár had gone to Karaikkál and sang the Nandan Charitram before the then Collector Sisay, how the Collector was filled with rapture, and how the Charitram got printed and published with the Collector's effort.

Bhárathiár had handed over a copy of the book to my father. He used to treasure it with great care. That book is still with me.

At the request of friends, the Nandanár Charitram discourse was launched. As my father was steeped in Shiva bhakti he could effectively bring out the profound devotional element charging the text. Nandan Charitram and its form could enrapture even youngsters. People were deeply engrossed in it. The crowd of listeners started swelling. Those who heard the discourse memorized with ease one or more of the keerthanás and started singing them with great devotion. Even those with no exposure to music derived joy in reciting those keerthanás.

I would be proceeding somewhere; from nowhere would emerge a voice singing 'There is a remedy sovereign to rid you of your madness'; from another corner, yet another voice with discordant melody, 'setting eyes on *Shiva Loka Náthá*. While looking at some old men, youngsters would break into a line from Nandan Charitram, 'Hey oldie! Grey is your moustache; greyed your passion?' Some young boys would dance singing 'Soon is to come the Thiruvávadithurai day in month Márkazhi. Those trained in *Vedánta Shástrá* would be reciting, 'The elemental flame raging through vital breath'. So it was. The keerthanás of Nandanár Charitram were dancing in the hearts of young boys, the youth, the middle aged and the old. Innocent little girls would come to listen saying "There is Nangan Charitram". Many persons came daily for the discourse from villages surrounding Kalathoor. ◈

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21. CHIDAMBARA UDAYÁR

Chidambara Udayár was one of those who attended my father's Nandan Charitram discourses held in Kalathoor. He was a rich person from Maravanattham village north of Kalathoor. Full of Shiva bhakti. Always seen with holy ash smeared on his forehead and wearing *Rudhráksha* beads. Naturally benevolent towards the poor; had a radiant fair complexion.

He had four sons and four daughters. He had constructed four independent houses for his four sons on one wing of the street and four others for his four sons-in-law on the other wing. He divided the income equally. At one end of the street he had built a house for himself and his wife and lived a pious life. He was about seventy when I first saw him.

The unity in the family was well maintained. Other wealthy people admired his disciplined life. It was common practice for even old people to hold a tight rein on managing the family, to ride roughshod over adult children and to deny joy to themselves and their family members. Not having been exposed to family responsibilities or battered by experience, such children were at a loss to manage matters after their father's passing away. Bearing this in mind, Chidambaram Udayár arranged for his sons and sons-in-law

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to manage their families independently. As a result Udayár could live his life with no avoidable worry.

As one steeped in Shiva Bhakti, he was keenly interested in listening to Nandanár Charitram discourse. He attended the discourses regularly from day one. At the conclusion of the discourse on the first day, he came towards my father and paid respect to him. "Let your grace be on me...I'll attend the discourse everyday," said he and took leave. We were all filled with surprise that such a rich and influential person was so modest. He had a horse. He always rode his horse to the places he visited. Everyday he paid respect to my father and then only left. He listened to the discourses with tear-filled eyes. Listening day after day to the glory of Chidambaram and Nandanár's devotional ecstasy and longing to go to Chidambaram, Udayár nearly started transforming into another Nandanár:

'Thillai Thillai endrár piravi
Illai illai endru maraimozhiyum'

('Chant Thillai Thillai
No no to birth another
This the divine word')

He kept chanting this verse, shedding tears of ecstasy. Should anyone ask him for his name, pat came the reply "I am Thillai". While Chidambaram and Thillai are one and the same, the name Thillai sent special vibrations in him. Just as Nandanár ever thought of the holy site of Thillai, Chidamabra Udayár was also getting reduced to that state. He had had darshans in many holy Shiva sites; but, after listening to Nandan Charitram he developed unbounded attachment to Chidambaram. At the conclusion of the discourses, he went to Chidambaram, arranged with a Dikshithar there for a special poojá at the temple, and set up an

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endowment to yield necessary interest income to meet the related expenditure.

Chidambara Udayár developed a respect for my father bordering on devotion. He would often meet him, pay respects and listen to some devotional stories. At the conclusion of the Nandan Charitram discourses he gave a gift of 100 rupees to my father. Further he took him to his relatives and friends and arranged for additional gifts. The people in that neighbourhood had developed a deep affection for my father. His association with Chidambara Udayár reinforced their affection and support.

Jagannátha Udayár:

Jagannátha Udayár was a trustee of a temple in a place called Thiru Álanthurai. He took my father to the temple, assisted him in having a darshan and gave him fifty rupees for the marriage expenses.

While at Kalathoor my mother had an attack of rheumatic fever and suffered for a few days. Then followed a brief spell of mumps. On such occasions I used to do the cooking in the house; would also provide all assistance to my mother.

Visit to Kárkudi:

We went to Kárkudi from Kalathoor to meet a few friends. We stopped there for a few days. The villagers gave fifty rupees towards marriage expenses. Then we returned to Kalathoor.

Marriage Attempt:

My father used to visit villages off and on with our relatives, in search of a suitable bride for me. My mother and I stayed back in Kalathoor. I continued to be involved

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in studying Tamil texts. 'Oh! I have not landed a good teacher', this concern increased by the day. When I found my father and his younger brother involved in fixing a marriage for me, it gave me neither joy nor sorrow. Those days, getting married and assuming the title of '*Grahastha*' had a certain prestige attached to it. If a sixteen year old boy remained unmarried, people around thought that there was some major flaw in him.

The people who tend to swim with the social current are not steadfast in their principles. What was considered respectable those days is deemed crazy now. What was once considered disreputable is adopted today with no hesitation.

My father was on bride search for many months; scanned many horoscopes but nothing was found suitable. He had somehow collected funds required for the wedding; and then came the worry of not finding a suitable girl. Maybe he thought that if I didn't get married fairly soon it would be a great misfortune! We did not have a long and stable innings in any one place; as a result I could not continue my Tamil learning in a satisfactory manner. Our life was marked by absence of stability. In these circumstances it would be no big deal if I didn't happen to get married for a few more years. It was the pressure of the prevalent social norms that made my father feel forlorn about my continuing to be a *brahmachári*.

Marriage Fixed:

After endless search the horoscope of a girl from nearby Málápuram village was found to be suitable. It was decided to settle the marriage between myself and one Madurámbikai, daughter of a distant relative Ganapathi Iyer. Ganapathi Iyer and his father Ayyávayyar had learnt Tamil. On knowing that I was pursuing Tamil learning, they felt that I would somehow eke out a reasonable living and agreed to give the

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girl in marriage to me. The old women in that household expressed satisfaction: 'This boy is goodlooking; has a luxurious tuft; sings well'.

Ayyâvayyar was a village accountant in Thittai village east of Thanjavoor. Ganapathi Iyer was his eldest son. They were better off than us. Owned landed property; theirs was the only storeyed house in that village; it was called 'Mádiyám'(storeyed house). They were attracted by my father's Shiva Bhakti, pious habits and good reputation. So they were extremely happy with the proposed alliance.

Help from Chidambara Udayár:

My father had assured Ganapathi Iyer to give him 200 rupees for marriage expenses, 35 rupees for the special 'wedding sari' and rupees 150 towards jewels. Some more amount was required for rituals like Grahapravesam. Estimating the different items of expenditure, my father felt that an additional amount of 150 rupees would make things comfortable. He went to Maravanaththam and informed Chidambara Udayár about this situation. Expressing genuine happiness about my forthcoming marriage, he told my father not to worry about money and that as a person blessed by Lord Natarájá he would get whatever he wants. He took him to his lemon grove. He took out hundred rupees from his areca-nut pouch. "Keep this for the time being. At the time of wedding *muhoortham* I would give 50 rupees, and also more if need arises". Father accepted the amount and requested Udayár to honour the wedding with his presence. "I will definitely be there. My father's annual ceremony is due around that time. I will perform that and then come. I will bring the money with me. Don't have any worry. Go back to your village happily". Udayár gave him leave.

My father returned to Utthamadánapuram with me and my mother. ◈

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22. MY MARRIAGE

All marriage arrangements were made in Málápuram. Relatives had gathered from many villages. It was a time when the speed of the train or of the bus was unknown there; the marriage arrangements would proceed at a leisurely pace. The work would start a month before the wedding. For a whole month and more the family would be involved in the effort.

Today and Those Days:

These days everything is marked by hurry. Today's scene: the betrothal on the first day, the marriage on the second and no trace of marriage on the third day. Even for the sake of form, the wedding invitation does not contain a request to the invitees to come four days before the marriage. When the wedding itself folds up in one day, where is the question of the guests landing four days earlier?

In the good old days when a marriage was celebrated in a family, some relatives would make their appearance a full month earlier. Many would arrive a week before. They would not be fussing about receiving proper attention. Would willingly offer whatever assistance they could. Planting a pole to erect the wedding pandal (a temporary shed made of plaited coconut leaves), erecting the pandal, decorating the pandal and eventually dismantling it - the village folks and the wedding guests would join hands in all these chores. Would erect a pandal covering the stretch

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of street fronting the wedding house. Women were busy assisting in cooking, serving and decking each other. So there was no hassle to look for outsiders to perform various tasks. As all persons were jointly involved in the various jobs, there was no room for complaint about inadequate attention. Even so there were minor irritants between the families of the bride and bridegroom. This *sambandi* scuffle was an integral and spicy part of all weddings.

During weddings the villagers' unity and helping tendency came to the fore. The expenses were not as threatening as we encounter today. These days we are inventive in finding new avenues for expenditure. Today's expenditure on wedding feasts would have been more than adequate to meet the entire wedding cost of those days. The vegetables and fruits grown in the village were used for the wedding feasts. These days the so-called English vegetables, the sweetmeats with fancy Hindi names and preserved Western fruits in cans have become indispensable in weddings. While harmony amongst nations is not visible in many matters, many countries seem to play a part while we buy things involving large sums.

What expenses for wedding processions! The car is converted into a veritable heavenly floral palanquin! What decorations for the vehicle flaunted just for a few hours! Labour of so many! The floral décor vies with the decorations for the ritual icon during temple festivals! Maybe even rivalling the temple festivals.

Even with all these extravagant expenses, the arrival and departure of the guests is reduced to an empty formality. Only while tallying the accounts at the end of the wedding, the shock unfolds. A wedding which should enhance happiness among two families cause untold hardship because of

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mindless extravagance. How many families in Tamil Nadu have courted ruin, all because of a solitary wedding! Those days the expenses in respect of some items were limited. The first day was *Nichayathámboolam*, in which the parents exchange betel leaves etc., confirming the engagement. The betrothal and formal invitation to the bridegroom did not involve much expense. Further, the expenses for erecting the pandal, the offerings to the priests and the *Nágaswaram-Melam* music were shared equally by the families of the bridegroom and the bride. The boy's family met the full cost related to the procession through the village.

Feast Regimen:

Morning coffee was unknown then. *Dhal pongal* and gourd *sámbár* constituted the breakfast. *Karuvadám*, *Appálam* and *Vathal* played the supporting cast. Some used to eat previous day's rice soaked in water(pazhayadu). There was no practice of mid-afternoon snacks. The children ate rice when hungry. After lunch, only the night meal. Lunch scheduled only after twelve. Leaves will be spread only after the elders had completed their poojá rituals. All ate together. Unlike today there was no question of persons sauntering in the wedding house at their whim and ordering the spreading of plantain leaves. *Appalam*, *Ámavadai* and *Poli* were popular.

During the four days of wedding all the persons in the village were invited for food. During each session everyone came at the appointed time.

Nalangu and other works:

Women were enthusiastic participants during the swing (Oonjal) and the *Nalangu* frolic during the morning and the afternoon. Old women would sit in a corner and enjoy

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the sight. The singers from both the bride's and the bridegroom's sides would sing popular village songs. The songs were mostly in Tamil. There were palanquin rides everyday, morning and evening. The procession on the last day was marked by sparklers and crackers. This was dominated by young boys. During the procession there was a formal offer of betel leaves and areca nuts (*Thámboolam*) to each house. Whole dried areca nuts were counted and delivered at each house, taking into account the number of residents. This was called Thinnai Pákku. If it was not delivered the house owner would get furious. During the wedding muhoortham time banana, betel leaves and areca nuts were given to the guests. As a mark of respect, a coconut smeared with turmeric was kept in a Thámbálam, a salver with a raised rim. This was accompanied by *Panchádhi* chant. While offering the Thámboolam the host would hold tight the turmeric-smeared coconut. It was not the practice to take the coconut at that point. Only during *Upanayanam* it was the general practice to offer coconut to the guests. Little boys managed to steal a few whole areca nuts, smuggle it to the female mango seller, pick up a mango and savour it. In anticipation of this sly areca nut deal, some female mango sellers were hanging around near the wedding house.

Āseervádam or the gift-giving routine occurred on the fourth night. Attendance here was mandatory for the relatives and villagers. Absence here resulted in heartburn. The Āseervádam schedule was often shifted in expectation of their arrival.

Strange indeed:

I was then in my fourteenth year. The bride was eight. The practice of seeing the bride before marriage on a 'girl seeing mission' was not generally prevalent those days. The

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elders took all the decisions. While I had seen the 'bride-girl' in the normal course earlier, I had not moved with her; hadn't even spoken to her. I felt strange that we were going to marry each other. The pleasure the guests derived by teasing us and having fun, was definitely more than the pleasure we felt.

As per the practice in our village, we performed special 'full-moon poojá' to Vináyakár consecrated in the Shivá temple. The Vináyaká idol was covered fully with a thick coat of sandal paste. A large sandal grinding stone was kept in a common place for this purpose. It was brought to the marriage house; two three bundles of betel leaves and areca nut shavings were kept near the grinding stone. Also dried and folded banana bark with supply of snuff. Those involved in the grinding chore used them while engaged in the job.

After *poojá* and *abhishekam* the offerings of fruits, sundal and modhakam were distributed. The modhakam was the size of a mango. There was an unwritten rule as to who could distribute what. When they were in the village they used to do this distribution regularly. Apart from these aspects of the special poojá, the women in our house would perform poojás to our family deity.

My marriage was celebrated in a grand manner by the standards of those days.

The tanks and streams in the village were full of water. So there was adequate convenience for the bath and related requirements of the guests.

During the Nalangu I sang a few metrical compositions. My junior grand father Ayyákkutti Iyer had taught me those pieces. Our family guru Ayyá Vádyár conducted all the rituals in a fitting manner.

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Chidambara Udayár's Arrival:

My marriage was celebrated on the fourth day of the Áni month in Vibhava year (16.6.1868). Maravanatham Chidambara Udayár arrived at night, riding his horse. He would have come the day before. As he had to perform his father's annual ceremony that day, he started on the morning of the wedding and reached Málápuram that night. As soon as he arrived he gave fifty rupees to my father, as he had earlier promised. My father expressed his deep sense of gratitude for the timely help.

As he alighted from the horse all the guests realized that he was a wealthy person. When he handed over a bag of jingling money they were all surprised. This made them feel that my father was a very influential person. A few wealthy Vellálás had also come from Ariyiloor and other places. They were appropriately received and courteously attended to. On observing the respect they showed to my father, my father-in-law and his people were quite impressed. 'Our alliance is only with a good family. He moves so freely with big people. The son-in-law would sure be well taken care of'. They appeared very satisfied.

Grahapravesam:

It was a four-day wedding. Arrangements had been made for *Grahapravesam* in our Utthamadánapuram house on the fifth evening. When we were about to start, there was a big downpour accompanied by thunder and lightning. We had to leave Mangalápuram for Utthamadánapuram. The bride's people advised us against venturing out in that inclement weather. Even after the rain had stopped they were inclined to stop us. My father had made elaborate arrangements at the other end; special food items had been prepared. He was worried that all that would go waste.

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One Viswanátha Sástri of Thyágasamudram was one of the wedding guests. He was a renowned Sanskrit scholar. He used to teach Sanskrit to a European by name Burnal, who occupied the position of district judge; he was also trained in astrology. My father asked him if we could embark on the journey as the rain had stopped. He endorsed the idea reassuring us that no harm would come our way. Some people from the bride's family still objected. Immediately Sástri rattled off a number of Sanskrit slokás and established that the rain was a good omen and that the journey was truly blessed. My father was very pleased that the Sástri's words had dispelled the gloom cast by the rain. We set off to Utthamadánapuram.

The Grahapravesam ceremony was conducted in an impressive manner. In fact, it excelled even the wedding celebration. 'Though they have left our village they appeared to be better off than before'. So felt the village folks there.

Varagur Gopála Bhágavathar:

After the wedding we stayed in Utthamadánapuram for a few days. In between, a few others and I went to a nearby village to attend a function in my wife's uncle's place. My father stayed back. At that point a wedding was celebrated in the house opposite our Utthamadánapuram house. A savant by name Gopála Bhágavathar had come for this wedding from Varagur with his retinue. He had a reputation in delivering *Harikathá* discourses. He was very orthodox and was strict in adhering to ritual observances. He performed Harikathá at that wedding. On listening to this, my father was sorry that I was not present there. He told me on my return: "Gopála Bhágavathar had performed Harikathá. You could have benefited a lot had you been present". The Bhágavathar was there that day as well. I met him and paid respects to him. I was pleased to see his radiant frame, im-

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pressive coat of holy ashes, string of rudráksha beads and spotless dress. About twenty to thirty singers had come with him. All of them looked like embodiments of purity and Bhakti.

Gopála Bhágavathar asked me to sing a few keerthanás. At his request I also recited a few Tamil verses. He was pleased and blessed me heartily.

In Yellow Dhoti:

After a few days in Utthamadánapuram, my parents and I returned to Kalathoor through Kunnam. As a typical new bridegroom, I wore yellow dhothi and visited Kunnam and Kárkudi and received the blessings from the elders there.

My mother was the first to be overjoyed on seeing me as a '*Grahasthá*' in the typical '*panchakacha*' style dhoti. My father had undergone untold stress in connection with my wedding. So he was both relieved and happy that a noble deed had been well accomplished.

The Sole Passion:

From a few days before the wedding to a few days thereafter, I too had a new excitement. When peace returned after rounds of meeting so many people, that excitement left me. I could not find any positive development in me merely on the basis of my Grahasthá status. I found no profit in the wedding, except for some incidental income and in the visits to many villages. I had only one aim, one passion. Tamil was my wealth; only Tamil can feed my intellectual hunger; the stronger my involvement in it, the greater my joy, the greater my satisfaction of having done something good, the stronger the feeling that I had derived benefit. So was it then, and so is it now. The situation has not changed at all.

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23. YEARNING AND HOPE

When we were in Kalathoor we used to receive foodgrains as gift. It contained more of Kambu millet and and less of paddy. We bartered the millet for paddy.

Ammá Eating Kambu Meal:

One day I observed Ammá while she was eating. The food on the banana leaf appeared different. She was eating food made of Kambu millet. I came to know that she was providing rice to me and Appá and was eating Kambu meal for a few days.

"Ammá, why are you doing this?" I asked her.

"After all, is not Kambu good for health? Instead of exchanging it for paddy, I am doing this".

"In that case why are you serving us rice meal?'

She had no answer. At my insistence she also started eating much like us.

Learning under Rághava Iyer:

Deepávali arrived in Aippasi month. As it was my 'Thalai Deepávali' (the first Deepávali after marriage), at my father-in-law's invitation, my parents and I went to his village. The *Thalai Deepávali* was celebrated in Málápuram.

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It coincided with the conclusion of six months since my wedding. I received zari dhoti and angavastram costing seven rupees as also fourteen rupees for the 'six month event'. At that point I was wearing only a silver bracelet. As per my mother's desire, the fourteen rupees was used to make a silver chain for me. As my father took ill after Deepávali we had to stay in Utthamadánapuram for a period of six months.

During those days one Rághava Iyer was working as a teacher in a small school in Pápanásam. He had learnt many Tamil texts. He had learnt under Thyagarása Chettiár who taught Tamil in Kumbakonam College and also under Mahá Vidwán Sri Meenákshisundaram Pillai. Having learnt about Rághava Iyer, I thought of studying under him without wasting time in my village.

Accordingly I went to Pápanásam one day, met him and requested him to teach me. He agreed. I started learning from him the *Kandigai* commentary of *Nannool*. Every morning I went to Pápanásam from Utthamadánapuram. I spent the whole daytime there and learnt from him during his spare time.

He used to refer in effusive terms to Sri Meenákshisundaram Pillai and Thyágarása Chettiár: "Thyágarása Chettiár is the teacher at whose feet one should learn Nannool. The nuances of Nannool were at his fingertips. There is none like him to explain lucidly the significance of the '*Nadavámadisee*' formula of Nannool. He had learnt it from Pillaiváll". The more I heard such effusive remarks the more my long-felt yearning surged in me leaving a trail of longing.'Can I go to Kumbakonam and learn under Chettiár? Will I be so blessed? He teaches in a government college; would he condescend to teach me?' I agonized.

I learnt under Rághava Iyer continuously for one week. An acquaintance of his told me one day, "You are learning

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under him every day. He is very poor. Should you not think of paying him something?" What he said was indeed true. But I was in no position to provide him any remuneration. I didn't have the courage to broach this subject with my father. Realizing that it was wrong to put him to this trouble I stopped going to him on a daily basis. I started approaching him only off and on to get some doubts clarified.

Later Rághava Iyer worked as Tamil pundit in a Madurai college, and subsequently took to sanyás.

'Let him learn English':

One day my father and I went to Kumbakonam on an errand. We visited my father's friend Venkat Rao who was working as a Vakil there. During their conversation he enquired about me. "He is learning Tamil; and also practising music. He is eager to learn Tamil under some savant. I understand that Thyágarása Chettiár here is an esteemed scholar. He wants to learn under him". Having said this my father asked me to recite a few Tamil verses composed by him.

Venkat Rao listened to this. "It's good alright. But, what is the use of learning all this in this day and time? Why take all this trouble? Ask him to leave it all aside and make him learn English. I'll help him; I'll also request my friends to chip in. He will truly come up in life in a few years". This was his concerned advice.

I was not pleased with his words. I was not inclined to think that he had tended this advice only with my interest at heart. In fact, I only got angry with him. 'We only asked him a way to access Thyágarása Chettiár to learn under him. And what is his response? He is advising me to learn English! I don't want English; nor do I seek a job through

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English' – so ran my thoughts.

"He had tried to learn English earlier. Studied Telugu too. But his mind refused to focus on them. His passion and intensity are exclusively reserved only in learning Tamil. It doesn't appear possible to divert his mind in any other direction", my father replied him and returned to Utthamadánapuram.

Physical toil:

My father's younger brother was looking after our land in Utthamadánapuram. During the six months I spent there, I used to go to the fields with him. Cultivation was on in the dry land farm. I assisted him in tending the plants and creepers; set up fence; drew water from the well and collected vegetables from the plants. When people from my father-in-law's house happened to see me, I was more busy than usual. I was interested in leaving a favourable impression on them: 'He hasn't become a lazy bum by merely reading books; a responsible boy; would sure prosper'. It is common among villagers to be involved in such chores from their young days. Those days no stigma was attached to working in one's own field.

Appá's Shiva Poojá:

We spent a few days in Sooryamoolai. There, under my mother's father's counsel, Appá had *Spatipa* (crystal) Linga consecrated and also learnt the related poojá rituals. Meenákshi Sundareswarar was the holy name of the Shiva icon. Till then he was performing the usual poojá, but thereafter his Shiva poojá became very elaborate. Like my grand father he also adopted a norm not to perform poojá without milk for abhisheká and vilva leaves for archaná. He was getting more and more deeply involved in Shiva poojá. He

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would eat only the cooked rice offered to the deity during his poojá.

Delivering Rámáyaná discourses had been an important part of his life for many years. His heart would melt at the thought of the sterling qualities of Lord Rámá. But his love for Rámá paled before the intense devotion he lavished on Lord Shivá.

Not that his devotion to Rama as the paragon of virtue diminished in any manner. Even so, the inner chamber of his heart was reserved for Lord Shivá. During the earlier part of his life his musical talent was responsible for his fame and esteem. In the latter part, Shiva poojá and Shiva bhakti were central to his recognition. He was a mix of many qualities: anger and a nameless animus towards relatives; a fierce determination; dauntless spirit in adversity; and musical talent. But, whenever I think of him, his remarkable Shiva bhakti comes to my mind far beyond his shortcomings and noble qualities.

Arumbávoor Náttár:

After some time we moved to Kunnam from Sooryamoolai. My father continued to deliver discourses as before. My old zest was slowly ebbing away. I kept reading again and again the books with me. It was not a satisfying experience. There was no scope for new endeavour. At this point a wealthy Náttár from Arumbávoor halted in our house in Kunnam on his way to Ariyiloor. He was a friend of Sri Meenákshisundaram Pillai. Trained in Tamil too.

During our conversation he discerned my love for Tamil. He explained in myriad ways the greatness of Pillai. He told my father: "Your son is so much interested in Tamil. Why are you unnecessarily holding him captive in this

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small village? If only you could entrust him to Pillavál he can learn a lot and develop well. If you keep him confined here, he would languish and waste away. I am not happy with this situation".

"If I do take him to Pillai, where is the guarantee that he would agree to teach him?" My father flagged his concern.

"Why such worry? Many disciples are learning under him. And so many have prospered based on the know ledge they have so gained. Nothing pleases him more than mentoring good students. Presently he is in Nágapattinam, formally presenting its *Sthala Purana*. I have just returned after spending a month there. You can always find disciples learning under him".

"All that's fine. But, I don't have the heart to send him away all alone. Further, if I leave him there I would require funds for his food and other requirements. His marriage was performed only recently. I have already spent a lot of money. And how do I manage more funds at this point?" My father expressed his anxiety.

"I have only expressed my genuine feelings. You can't think of any other mentor of Pillai's standing to teach your son. Give it some thought, and do as appropriate." He then left.

Likewise a few others also told us about Pillaivál's great qualities and profound erudition. Consequently thoughts of the great savant started dominating my mind. I longed for divine benediction.

Dawn of Hope:

One morning I picked up the text of Thiruvilaiyádal Puánam. A thought crossed my depressed and crushed mind.

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'Why not I place a string in this book and see the result?' I did it. There is a convention in this regard. Ask someone to place a string at some part of sacred books like Rámáyaná or Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam; open that page; read the verse at the bottom of the page; ascertain the mood in the verse; if there is a positive ring to it our intention will be fulfilled; and if it has negative overtone our intention will be foiled.

I made a young boy place a string inside the book. It was page 160 in that old book published in the Panguni month of Dhurmathi year. It was a section dealing with providing meaning to Veda. There is a tradition that some sages came to Madurai without knowing the meaning of Veda and performed penance at the feet of Dakshinámoorthy, the consecrated idol there. The tradition has it that the deity materialized and blessed the sages with the knowledge of the meaning of Veda. In the same page there were verses describing how Dakshinámoorthy appeared in a beautiful form. At the foot of the page I saw Verse. No.23.

I opened the book gingerly with an apprehension if my dream would be fulfilled. I was missing my heartbeats. 'God! Bless me with a good verse!' I opened the page with bated breath. As I opened the page my mind was in a flutter. I looked at the page with trepidation that the verse should augur well.

'Seetamani mooralthiru vaaysiri tharumba
Mádhavargal kánaveli vanduveli ninrán
Nádhamudi váyalavi nánmarayazhi nandha
Padhavadi váginirai váginirai poorana puránari'
('The ultimate in melody
Wisdom incarnate
Essence of Vedas four

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The all-encompasisng Whole -
Stood He
Pearly teeth gleaming
Bathed in smile beautific!)

As soon as I saw the verse I got goose-flesh. My eyes grew moist. It was a defining moment. The verse announced the emergence of Dakshinámoorthy, the Lord Mentor. Yearning as I was to seek the feet of a guru, the verse left me ecstatic. A hope dawned in my mind that god would not for sake me."Lord Meenákshisundaram of Madurai lavished grace on sages. I will be blessed with the Tamil savant bearing the holy name of the Lord." I felt reassured. The thought that the icon in my father's poojá niche is also Meenákshisundaram gladdened me further. I was charged with a new joy and motivation. I narrated the incident to my father. He was also very happy.

'How to reach him? What to do for the expenses? Can I stay there alone?' These questions started to loom large. The verse from Thiruvilaiyádal quelled those fears. As a rooster awaiting the break of dawn I started counting days hoping for the auspicious day.

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24. KÁRIGAI LESSON

Rama Iyengár in whose house we were staying in Kunnam learnt about my situation and sympathised with me. Then one day he told my father, "If we take him to the landlord Virudáchala Reddiár of Chenganam he would teach this boy".

"Who is this Virudáchala Reddiár?" asked my father.

"He is a wealthy man of Chenganam. A benefactor. A Tamil vidwán. Has the ability to effectively teach grammatical and literary texts."

"What to do for food and other things?"

"You can move there as a family. He would provide you all necessary facilities. I'll take you there. He is a friend of mine", said Rama Iyengár. He further dwelt on Virudáchala Reddiár's noble qualities. Iyengár was well trained in the Siddha Medicine texts. This had apparently provided the basis for his friendship with Reddiár. All the Tamil vidwáns of those parts were acquainted with Reddiár.

Move to Chenganam:

When Rama Iyengár told us about Reddiár, I found it comforting. I thought it was a good idea to learn whatever I could, without wasting time. Father agreed to move ot Chenganam.

Virudáchala Reddiár was friends with Kasturi Iyengár and Sámi Iyengár of Kárkudi and Kalathoor Ráma Iyengár.

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After scheduling the date of departure to Chenganam, Kunnam Ráma Iyengár informed the other three friends. They sent word that they would also come to Chenganam on that day to entrust me to Reddiár's care.

At the appointed day Ráma Iyengár took me and my father to Chenganam. Mother stayed back in Kunnam. The three friends had reached even before our arrival. The four of them entrusted me to Chenganam Reddiár and apprised him of my nature: "You must make him learn good Tamil texts. He has a focussed interest in pursuing knowledge in this field. He has no interest in anything else. Further, when he is under your mentorship you should also take care of the family". Reddiár agreed to do so. Benevolent by nature, would he at all be reluctant to adopt me as his disciple?

"What texts have you studied?" Reddiár asked me. I listed the texts and also the names of my teachers. Then I added, "While I have learnt these texts I have not acquired lucid knowledge in these texts. I look up to you to rid me of these shortcomings". "Sure, sure", he said with a smile.

Then he told me, "As you have learnt the Kándigai commentary of Nannool, you must be having a certain level of acquaintance with grammatical norms related to letters and words. This knowledge should be an adequate background to learn literature further. Next, it is necessary to learn prosody. So I will first teach you *Yápperunkal Kárigai*. Thereafter we will play it by the ear". Then he told my father that he could move to Chenganam with the family. We were overjoyed. We took leave of Reddiár and returned to Kunnam. On an auspicious day we moved to Chenganam. I entered the portals of Tamil learning after a break.

Reddiár had set up a house for our stay. Had sent necessary provisions in advance and also gave money for our

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expenses. At the beginning of each month, he unfailingly sent required paddy and two rupees.

Reddiár's Qualities:

There were three types of landlords in Chenganam: Big Pannaiyár [landlord], Junior Pannaiyár and Pattatthu Pannaiyár. Virdudáchala Reddiár belonged to the Junior Pannaiyár group. All these three types were referred to as Náttár. As they were trained in Tamil learning they bestowed affection on us and also extended necessary help. Some of them belonged to the Saivite sect and some to the Vaishnavite sect. Even so there were marriage links between these two sects.

Viruddáchala Reddiár was short in stature. Dark in complexion. Had a glistening body. Always spotlessly clean. Got up at five in the morning. The village abounded in farms, springs, sandy stretches and streams. Would go to some part, clean his teeth, complete morning ablutions, and return home by seven. Would take half an hour to clean his hands and wash his face. Would then smear dry holy ash on his forehead and body and start reading. Reading continued till eleven. Studied every aspect of a text intently and analysed it in his own mind. After lunch, he would be involved in studying books from two in the afternoon till eight in the night. Would never ever tire of reading. After supper, he would read Kamba Rámáyaná and explain it to his elder son Nallappa Reddiár. He always spoke with thoroughness and clarity.

As he was endowed with both material wealth and erudition, he commanded a lot of respect in those parts. People from neighbouring villages would often come there, spend a couple of days with him and enjoy the discussion sessions.

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He had learnt Tamil under a staunch Saivite by name Kannayyar. Harmony and friendship prevailed amongst Saivites and Reddiárs. Both these sects would often appreciatively refer to the patronage extended by a wealthy Annámalai Reddiár to a renowned Saivite savant Thuraimangalam Sivaprakásar. I had seen the small walled tanks set up for Sivaprakása Swámigal's bath and also the places frequented by him.

Viruddáchala Reddiár had collected and collated many Tamil palm manuscripts and printed books. He always kept ready many blank palm leaves. When he accessed rare Tamil texts not in his possession he would note down. He had good ability to write fast and legibly in palm leaves. For my use, he was good enough to write down a few Tamil texts in palm leaves. Sometimes we would sit together and take copies of different parts of a text. He devoted his time exclusively to reading, teaching and engaging in scholarly discussions. He owned considerable landed property. It was, however, being managed by his sons and his manager. People of his family and other relatives had a grievance regarding this attitude of his. Reddiár knew it but was not concerned.

Nallappa Reddiár:

When I started learning under Viruddáchala Reddiár, he was above fifty-five. He had five sons. The eldest son Nallappa Reddiár was also the beneficiary of considerable income from his wife's *Streedaná* property. It was a practice in their caste to endow their girls with a lot of *Streedanam* property during marriage. Therefore, these women enjoyed freedom and discernment along with the respect for their husbands.

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Nallappa Reddiár was a benevolent person. Trained in Tamil. Of noble disposition. Was very affectionate towards his Father. On his own he had also extended support to us.

Learning Yápperunkala Kárigai:

I started learning Kárigai on an auspicious day. At that stage I had hardly any knowledge of Tamil prosody. It was difficult to teach me this text but Reddiár taught this text to me patiently and with great lucidity. His scholarship and my eagerness combined well in this direction.

I commenced this study during the Márkazhi month of Shukla year (1869). He would wake me up at four in the morning. He would make me read Thiruvempávai in Thiruvásakam. He would repeat the previous day's lesson, ask me questions and helped imprint it in my mind. His questions were of great use to me. There is no use in continuing to teach without ascertaining the extent to which the student has obsorbed the lesson. He knew this aspect of pedagogy well. Making the disciple ponder over the lesson and raising questions frequently would help ensure mastery over the text.

Yápperunkala Kárigai, its meaning and the reference verses got implanted in my mind. Reddiár would elaborately explain the meaning of the reference verse and point out the relationship between the verse and the related grammatical norm. He would also ask me to compose a new verse incorporating a particular grammár principle. He would review the verse and explain the mistakes in the composition. There are apparently grammar texts in Telugu and Sanskrit which contain verses which embody the grammatical norm associated with the particular type of verse. Telugu was Reddiár's mother tongue. He was trained in Telugu also. He told me about the Telugu text, explained the method of composing a

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reference verse and urged me to attempt a similar composition. Accordingly, I incorporated the *Nerisai* metrical grammár in *Ásiriyappá* metre. With great difficulty I attempted such compositions. He would initially compliment and enthuse me; then he would point out mistakes if any.

In his commentary on the first verse of *Kárigai*, the commentator Gunasákarar cites examples from texts in other languages. Reddiár was not able to explain the history of those texts. So doubt persisted in respect of this aspect. In many examples quoted, there were verses with links to Jainism. He did not explain some of the aspects with religious underpinnings. Except for these gaps, all other aspects registered clearly and firmly in my mind. I find this intellectual foundation to be of value to this day. I am ever duty-bound to laud Reddiár's method of teaching which dispelled the popular notion that grammar is a hard nut to crack, and which made grammatical principles lucid and interesting. I learnt under him for four months but I have been enjoying its value throughout my life.

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25. LIFE IN CHENGANAM

Thuraimangalam Sivaprakása Swámigal's brothers Velayyar and Karunaiprakásar and their lineage and relatives had established houses in many villages in those parts. All of them had some training in Tamil. They memorized interesting verses, recited them at appropriate times, regaled the audience and also derived some monetary benefit. They and a few other vidwáns often visited Chenganam, stayed for a few days there, engaged in discussions with Viruddáchala Reddiár, got some of their doubts resolved and also obtained some monetary help. Some vidwáns also resolved some of Reddiár's doubts.

Collection of Stray Verses:

I derived benefit from these conversations. The stray verses recited by them were engaging. I noted and memorized them. On finding that I was trying to learn verses one by one, Reddiár told me one day, "I have a compilation of stray verses. The book contains a large number of verses". And he gave me the book. It was first published in Dundhubi year(1862) by Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar. It then cost rupee five.

On seeing it, I felt as if I had landed a treasure. The verses contained a variety of ideas and also clever turn of phrases; this attracted me. I read again and again the verses of Kálamega Pulavar containing verbal manipulations and puns, and enjoyed them. I repeated the puns and rejoiced; got involved in the bhakti element and the lucid style of the verses of Pala Pattadai Chokkanáda Pulavar.; got engrossed in the flow of the verses of Avvaiyár and others. I treasured

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each of these verses as a gem, each with its own flavour; I used to enjoy them whenever I had leisure. I also joyously shared them with others. Soon enough these verses got etched in my memory; my love of Tamil got enhanced by this experience.

Later Reddiár gave me a printed version of *Yápperunkala Kárigai* and of a few other texts. At the time when printed books were rare, I held on to these books as a treasure.

After Kárigai Reddiár taught me *Poruttham* grámmar (Grammatical norms related to auspicious appropriateness both verbal and situational) and *Prabanda* grámmar (grammatical norms related to different forms of Prabanda or literature classified as 'minor literary works' in Tamil.

The Texts I Read:

Viruddáchala Reddiár had many Tamil texts. Some of them were palm manuscripts; some were printed books. Many of the palm manuscripts had been written by his own hand. He was well trained in the *Bhágavathá* text composed by Chevvai Chooduvár. He had written down the entire text in his own hand in palm leaves. During my spare time I used to browse those books. I raised with Reddiár some doubts concerning the subjects covered by these books. He willingly clarified. Thanks to this practice I received light on the range and depth of the Tamil ocean, on many rare texts as also the history of many Tamil savants. I read on my own *Dandialankáram*, *Thirukkural* and *Thirukkovaiyár*. I also read many parts of *Kamba Rámáyaná*.

Prosody:

Reddiár had studied Tamil prosody texts deeply and delineated the norms lucidly. On the walls adjoining the house thinnai, pictorial verses such as Twin *Nágabandam*

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and *Ashta Nagabandam* had been inscribed. As I had already studied a few works on Tamil prosody I could understand his exposition fairly clearly. As desired by Reddiár, I collated the grammatical norms related to a particular aspect of prosody and recorded them in palm leaves. For instance, I put together all the prosodial norms in respect of Mangala harmony. Likewise I repeated this exercise in respect of other aspects as well. The text I so compiled constituted clusters of verses containing thematic concordance in alphabetical order. Unfortunately I lost this text later. Reddiár had a Prabanda Grammar text named *Dhattáthreya Páttiyal* (Prosody). I read that too, but had not copied it. This book is not now available in Tamil Nadu. With Reddiár's help I learnt grammar related to *Chithra Kavi* (Pictorial Versification) and also the method of composing such verses.

Perumál Iyer:

Perumál Iyar was a Brahmin landlord friend of Reddiár. He was mostly with Reddiár. He was well trained in Tamil Prosody, Poruththam Grammar and Chitra Kavi or pictorial versification. He used to draw outlines of pictorial verses such as *Ratha Bandham*, *Nága Bandham*, *Kamala Bandham* and *Chakra Bandham*. I would encase verses within those outlines. I also learnt to draw those pictorial outlines.

One day I wrote one Ásiriya Viruttham form of verse with six 'seers' or metrical feet and showed it to Perumál Iyer. Tha verse contained four lines; six seers or metrical feet; and also had the appropriate rhyme and alliteration. But the melodic element was defective. Perumál Iyar saw it and smiled. "What is the defect in this?" I asked him. "You read it yourself; check if the melodic element has come out properly," he told me.

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I read it a few times. I realized that the melodic element was not quite proper but I wouldn't agree. "Are there not six seers?" I queried. "There are six *seers*. But they are not in their proper places. That's why there is discordance in the melody". Having said this, he picked up *Prabhu Linga Leelai* text and read out a few verses. When I learnt the grammar related to Viruttham or metrical form, I had registered that the seers should have an element of harmony. This was called '**Alavotthal**'. I thought that this meant that if there are six seers in one line, the other lines also should have six seers; in other words, the number of seers should be the same in all the four lines.

I had not realized that the principle of Alavotthal has another dimension. Perumál Iyer explained the principle with an example: "If the first seer in the first line is a *Má* seer, the first seer in the other lines also should be *Má* seer. In the cited verse each line has six seers. The first two seers as well as the fourth and the fifth seers are Má seers; the third and the sixth seers are '*Kái*' seers. This structure is sustained in every line; if there is a change the melody will be affected. Because of such an arrangement of seers there are many types in every form of Viruttham".

Only after his detailed explanation I could understand these nuances. Merely by reading a book one cannot gain full understanding; one should learn from a knowledgeable teacher – I could realize the significance of this prescription of the learned. I had come across many who had composed verses as they pleased with melodic disharmony, based on a wrong notion of what constitutes *Vennpá*, *Kattalai Kalitthogai* and *Viruttham*. This lapse results from not learning these norms from a learned mentor. I see this slip even today. There are many worthies who laud such defective verses and their composers. I only pity them.

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An Elder's Recall:

As usual Reddiár's eldest son Nallappa Reddiár read Kamba Rámáyaná one day and learnt its meaning from his father. He was reading Kumbakarna section that day. For his reference, he had with him a printed book published by Thirisirapuram Govinda Pillai. At that point an elderly landlord of the village and I were present there. The landlord was about seventy then. At one point the landlord interjected and asked Nallappa Reddiár, "Have you skipped some pages here?" "No, I am reading continuously" was the reply. "Some more verses should be here. I have read them. I believe they have been left out in this book. Those verses are very much there in the text in my possession". At the conclusion of the session he took me and Nallappá Reddiár to his house, took out his palm manuscript of Kamba Rámáyaná text and showed the relevant portion in the Kumbakarna section. Sure enough some verses not found in the printed book could be seen in that copy. We read those verses. We were amazed at the elderly gentleman's love and knowledge of Kamba Rámáyaná and at his admirable memory. We could also realize the glory of the palm manuscripts preserved over many generations.

Thirukkural:

Viruddáchla Reddiár was always immersed in reading Tamil texts; had no time for anything else. With my passionate involvement in Tamil I complemented him well. Teaching me and resolving my doubts were his new responsibilities; something close to his heart. He showered affection on me. There was a yawning gulf between him and me in age, intellect and wealth. But we were soulmates in savouring Tamil. There was none but me to spend the whole day with him on Tamil and its beauty.

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Thirukkural was one of the texts I was reading off and on. I developed a desire to keep the Thirukkural text always in my hand and to dip into it off and on. I was using Reddiár's copy. It would have been nice if I had my own copy so that I could read it wherever I wanted. I did not have the means to look for a printed version and to buy it. I remembered the promise made by a Ráyar headmaster of a school in Perumpuliyur that he would present the Thirukkural book with commentary available with him. Resolving not to miss this opportunity I decided to go to Perumpuliyur and informed Reddiár accordingly. "To Perumpuliyur? I'll also come with you. We can chat our way and back", said he. It was a pleasant surprise that he offered to walk both ways to Perumpuliyur with me.

We both went to Perumpuliyur. Met that Ráyar. He was delighted to see us. He had already heard about Reddiár and deemed it an honour that he had chosen to visit him on his own. Tamil united the three of us submerging our differences. We spoke for a long time about Tamil-related matters. "What you are doing is indeed noble. I am truly happy that you are teaching him. It is a godsend. He had been languishing in Kunnam with no one to teach him. It is his good fortune that he has got you as his mentor". Ráyar was effusive. As earlier promised, he handed over his copy of Thirukkural with heartfelt blessing. Then we both took leave of him and returned to Chenganam.

On the way back Reddiár pointed to a palmyra tree. It had many branches on all the four sides. I was amazed at the sight. He also mentioned that many people visited that part to look at this wonder. On return to Chenganam I started delighting in Thirukkural with great enthusiasm. That book contained word-by-word meaning, paraphrasing and commentary based on Parimelazhagar's old commentary. That

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book was published under the supervision of Kanchipuram Sabhápathi Mudaliár in Āni month of Nala year (1856).

Reference to Pillaivál:

While teaching me Reddiár used to refer to the vidwáns known to him. On knowing that I had learnt under Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár he mentioned that he had been acquainted with him. He also stated that he had met Thyágarása Chettiár, a Tamil pundit in Kumbakonam college, and that he was a great scholar in Tamil grammar. He also frequently spoke about Sri Meenákshi Sundaram Pillai. He used to make laudatory references to the beauty of Pillaivál's prefatory and synoptic inputs to Thirukkural text. "I have not seen the great man. But I have heard of his eminence. I understand that he can sing verses like the flooding waters of Káveri. He is always surrounded by students. I understand that there is no Tamil book not known to him. I have doubts in some Tamil texts and commentaries. I have noted down these doubts in the hope that I could get them clarified with him. I don't know when I will be blessed with this opportunity". Saying this Reddiár showed me the palm leaves where he had jotted down these doubts. It contained verses with their numbers and the parts of the commentaries. Whenever doubts cropped up while studying new texts, he noted down those doubts in this sheaf of palm leaves.

'Go to him':

I used to listen with rapt attention whenever he happened to refer to Pillaivál. I asked questions to access more information. I had told him of my desire to learn under Pillaivál and how I had tested my luck by placing a string in Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam text. We used to spend a lot of time speaking about Pillaivál. "Yes. Only if you go to him you could learn many new Tamil texts. He is the only sa-

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vant who could teach you to your entire satisfaction. We are all mere wells at an elevation fed by rains. He is like the perennially flowing Káveri. Learning under him is the best thing to do". He started expressing these views. Having heard such opinions from many others, Reddiár's words reinforced my determination.

Reddiár also expressed this opinion to my father. "I have taught him to the extent I could. It is better to leave him under Pillaivál's tutelage to enable him to learn better and derive more benefit. You shouldn't mistake me that I am suggesting this course to avoid supporting you. I have no problem if you stay here for years. God has blessed me with some means and I will happily support you to the extent possible for me. Don't think that I encounter any difficulty in teaching him. In fact, teaching him and spending time discussing Tamil-related matters with him gives me immense pleasure. We can continue like this, but it would not be in his interest. I am in the sunset phase of my life, with not much to look forward to; but he is very young and has a lot to achieve. If he learns under a proper mentor he will surely develop well. I am sorry to part with him but is it not a sin that I selfishly come in the way of his development?". He had repeated these sentiments earlier too.

After carefully listening to Reddiár, father came to a decision. "Wherever we go we encounter this assessment. It appears that this is god's will. We can't be indifferent any longer. It is necessary to somehow reach him to Pillaivál's care and mentoring". He shared this assessment with Reddiár and got ready to leave Chenganam.

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26. REACHING MÁYURAM

We stayed in Chenganam from Márkazhi month to Panguni month of Pramodhutha year (from December 1870 to March 1871). We heard that Mahá Vidwán Meenakshisundaram Pillai had formally presented his *Nâgappattina Puránam* and had returned to Máyuram from Nágapattinam.

The thought that I was going to learn under that great savant sent a thrill through me. All the fine things I had heard about him came to my mind. All my teachers from the Utthamadánapuram school from Sáminátha Iyer to Chenganam Viruddâchalam Reddiár had told me a lot about Pillaivál; with this I had developed a glorious image in my mind. Everyone would praise him as a teacher nonpareil, an exceptional poet and a paragon of nobility.

I would weave a web of fancy _ of his teaching me, of my learning a number of Tamil texts, and of his lavishing affection on me.

Leaving Chenganam:

On an auspicious day we took leave of Viruddáchala Reddiár and other friends and left Chenganam. There were many in different villages who had interest in our family welfare and in my educational development. We wanted to take leave of all of them. Finding it to be not particularly practical, we went to Kunnam and took leave of only the friends there. We requested those friends to inform others. Then we left for Ariyiloor.

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In Ariyiloor:

I went to the house of my first Tamil teacher Sadagopa Iyengár to tell him about the fortune awaiting me and to receive his blessings. He had then gone out. As I felt at home in that place, I picked up a new book lying around and went through it. Lo and behold! It was *Thirunágaikarona Purá-nam* composed by Pillaivál. While I had heard a lot about Pillaivál's erudition and poetic prowess I had not seen any book written by him. Seeing that book at that point of time appeared to be good omen to me. I turned the pages of the book and read a few verses. As I had just then completed learning about Tamil Prosody I could savour the structure of the verses, the charm of rhyme and alliteration and also their melodic beauty. *Thiribu Yamagam* (a form of alliteration) and pictorial verses were also found in that text. I felt elated that I was going to learn at the feet of a great savant who had composed this text and many other such texts.

While I was browsing that book Sadagopa Iyengár entered the house, warmly inquiring when I returned to Ariyiloor. I prostrated myself at his feet. Then I told him that I was going to learn under Pillaivál.

"Great news. He is a poet of renown; a man of erudition; indeed a great man. This Puránam was composed by him. Vakil Bálakrishna Pillai here has been learning this text for some time. This gave me an opportunity to read it. There is a certain majesty in the text. You must be truly blessed to learn under him. Make sure you don't cause him any displeasure. The minute you have decided to go to him all your worries should disappear. Study well and become a great vidwán", he sincerely blessed me.

"The Tamil nectar you so fondly lavished on me has led to this." I replied with genuine humility.

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As desired by some friends we stayed in Ariyiloor for ten days. During those ten days I learnt from Sadagopa Iyengár the verses from ***Thiruvarangathu Andháthi*** I had not learnt earlier, and also got some doubts about some early verses clarified.

Keezhai Pazhuvur:

A wealthy person by name Sabhápathi Pillai from Keezhai Pazhuvur near Ariyiloor met my Father and requested him to spend a few days in his village, and we went there. We stayed there for a week. He was the elder brother of Rao Bhahadur K.S.Srinivása Pillai, a Thanjávoor lawyer. Their Father Sivachidambaram Pillai and my Father had known each other since their boyhood days.He had provided a lot of help to our family.

Sabhápathi Pillai was trained in Tamil. He gave me *Thanjai Vánan Kovai* and other books. While learning *Thirukovaiyár* through Reddiár I got acquainted with Grammar concerning the Akam segment. Against this background I could understand the content of *Thanjai Vánan Kovai*. As the style of versification was lucid I found the meaning easy. I completed reading it in a few days.

Back to Utthamadánapuram:

We left Keezhai Pazhuvur, spent a few days in Periya Thirukundram and then reached Utthamadánapuram. The further destination was Máyuram. As my parents had not been separated from me till then they were worried about my living all alone in Máyuram.

'What a pass we have come to! How can I be alone without the child? Who is there to feed him with fondness? He does not even know how to smear oil on his body for his regular oil bath' – so ran Ammá's worry.

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'What to do? Such is our situation. Till now we move from place to place pursuing his place of study. We could do that only where we could set up an establishment conveniently. But this is not possible in Máyuram. Unlike people in the villages these town folks would not come forward to support us. Further persons in Ariyiloor and its neighbourhood are respectful towards me. No such persons in Máyuram. I am concerned even about his food and other requirements. Money is required for these arrangements. How to organize the funds?' – This was my father's worry.

Spiritual Mentoring:

My father believed in the grace of god. He had considerable faith in Shiva poojá and Manthra japa. He wanted me to learn some essential manthras through appropriate spiritual mentors.

One Neelakanta Iyer was a village accountant in Thyágasamudram north of Utthamadánapuram. He was close to my father. Was trained in music. He had learnt many keerthanás of Ganam Krishna Iyer. He had also mastered manthra sásthrá. He used to conduct special poojás to many gods. He was involved in many kinds of Manthra Japa and Yanthra Poojá. Was an adept in countering snake poison. Take a person with a snake bite and remaining unconscious, he would chant some manthras, the patient would stand up in ten minutes and start walking.

My father took me to him and requested him to teach me. Sri Vallabha Ganapathi Manthra, Sri Neelakanta Manthra and Sri Subramania Sadáksharam. He was kind enough to teach me these manthras, and also blessed me for more and more benedictions. I took leave of him after a few days and returned to Utthamadánapuram.

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Travel Arrangements:

We started making preparations for my move to Máyuram. My father had no money. On knowing this my father's friend Sámi Moopanár of Utthámadáni near Utthamadánapuram lent twenty-five rupees to my father as loan. That amount was a veritable treasure then. Was of great help to my education. I took leave of my relatives in Utthamadánapuram and the neighbouring villages.

As my mother was then pregnant my father took her and me to Sooryamoolai. We stayed there for a few days. My mother's father was happy to know that I was going to be a disciple of Pillaivál. He blessed me heartily.

Off to Máyuram:

My father and I left mother at Sooryamoolai and reached Máyuram. There, we stayed in my uncle's in-laws' house at Mahádánapura Street. Then my aunt had also come there for a visit.

My happiness and excitement was growing by the minute. Increasing worry was writ large on my father's face. At the thought of realizing a great dream of many months, I was oblivious to everything else. Gopála Krishna Bhárathiár used to be in Máyuram those days. I had known about him. On any other occasion I would have refused to see Bhárathiár. As soon as I set my foot on Máyuram I would have visited the beautiful Shivá temple at Máyuram and lost myself in prayers. I would have savoured the scenes in Máyuram town and nearby places. But, at that point all my thoughts were dominated by the great Pillaivál.

How many obstacles besetting a good cause! My attempts to learn Tamil faced hurdle after hurdle due to poverty and other causes. But I would not relent. Some of my

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relatives wanted me to learn Sanskrit. They thought that Sanskrit learning would serve me well through Rámáyaná / Bhárathá / Bhágavathá discourses. Some other distinguished gentlemen wanted me to improve my lot through English learning. They wanted me to earn through a formal employment. My father desired that I should hone my musical skills. His hope was not fulfilled. Against all these hopes and desires my heart was steeped since my childhood in the beauty of mother Tamil. It sought the grace of mother Tamil more and more. Sanskrit, Telugu and English failed to capture my fancy. Sometimes I even tended to nurse a hatred towards them. As I was connected to a musical lineage, and as it was the basis of my father's esteem and livelihood, I was drawn to music. But that fascination did not remain stable. Tamil was the core of my being. Music lingered only in its periphery. Tamil was ever waiting to usurp even that little place from Music.

When everyone else was eager to channel my attention to different fields, fulfilling my yearning was indeed difficult. Thanks to divine grace I was on the threshold of realizing my dream. I was going to take refuge at the feet of a great Tamil savant and drink deep the Tamil nectar and feel exalted - this very thought wiped out the hassles of the past and concern about the future. Each minute loomed large like an aeon. I was eagerly waiting for the day when I would have the benign darshan of Pillaivál, listen to his words and become one amongst his disciples.

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27. THE FIRST DAY

We reached Máyuram one morning. My father completed his bath and other ablutions and settled down for his poojá. Whenever my mother was not around I used to assist him in his poojá. That day too, I did likewise. I could see that the day's poojá involved his tearful entreaty to god for a good and productive life for me.

We had our food after the poojá. My father took rest for a while. Around three in the afternoon he and I went to see Pillaivál. As Sri Mayuranáthar temple was on the way, we went in and offered our prayers at the sanctum sanctorum.

Those days Pillaivál lived in a house west of the Saivite Mutt of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam. We went to that house.

The Twosome:

Two persons were seen in the front portion of the house. One of them had his forehead smeared with holy ash and was wearing Rudrákshá beads. My father and I took him to be Pillaivál. My father asked the other person in a soft voice, "Is this Pillaivál?". He took in father's appearance and told him pleasantly, "He is Thiruvávaduthurai Mahálingam Pillai".

Soon enough father asked him, "Where is Mahá Vidwán Pillaivál?"

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There was hardly any interval between the two questions. In the meanwhile fear and doubt and bliss crisscrossed in my mind. It did not occur to me that Pillaivál could have gone out briefly on some errand. 'Is he not in town? Would I be forced to go back to my village?' My mind was in a whirl!

The gentleman added, "Some work is going on in the backyard garden. Pillaivál is there supervising the work". I felt reassured.

The gentleman was a wealthy Sengunthar by name Thyágarája Mudaliár, belonging to Kutrálam village in Thanjávoor district. He had got the *sthalapuráná* of Kutrálam composed by Pillaivál. It was called Thiruvandháthi Puránam.

My father turned to the other gentleman Mahállingam Pillai and asked him, "Do you know Thiruvávaduthurai Kandasámi Kaviráyar? Is he keeping well?"

"He had reached Sivapadham(died) some time ago", he replied.

Appá was sad at this news. Kandasámi Kaviráyar was known to him. He was the principal vidwán of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam. Was Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár's teacher. Father had thought of making me learn under his tutelage. Appá was speaking about the qualities of kaviráyar, his friendship with him and his great modesty.

At that point Pillaivál's Thavasi Pillai (attendant) appeared. Father requested him to inform Pillaivál that we had come to call on him. He did so, and Pillaivál came to the front portion where we were standing.

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The First Scene:

I was struck by the savant's appearance. He came majestically like a sauntering elephant. A sumptuous presence, an emerging paunch, long arms reaching up to the knees, broad forehead, a small tuft, a lily-white dhothi - all these pointed to traditional wealth. Even so his face lacked the bloom of a rich person; had the tranquil poise of a deep and expansive ocean sans waves. His eyes were not marked by penetrating severity; nor studied disdain; they gently caressed whatever they touched.

His gait was marked by a calmness and an element of tiredness born out of chequered experience. There was no exuberance in his appearance; nor was there languor; no sign of excitement; no weariness either. A string of *Rudráksha* beads adorned his chest.

I felt like a devotee waiting for divine darshan after years of penance. He appeared like the god showering grace. My eyes were riveted on him. Surging waves of exultation filled me. Tears of joy glistened in my eyes. The moistness in the eyes partly screened the great savant's form. Discarding everything around, my eyes hovered around his frame and settled on his face.

What brings you here?

As soon as he came he asked me to sit down. I could feel only calmness in his tone. Everything was tranquil. He too sat down. He turned to my father and asked him, "May I know who you are? What has brought you here?" His words were bathed in solicitude.

"We are coming from Utthamadánapuram close to Pápanásam. We have come to call on you. He is my son. Learning Tamil. Has learnt under a few teachers. Has also

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had some training in Music. He is extremely eager to learn Tamil under your feet. Tamil dominates his mind. Nothing can deflect it. Has ever been thinking about you. So I have come here to entrust him under your benign care".

"What is your name?"

"My name is Venkatasubban. He is Venkatráman."

"Venkatasubban is a good name. Must be a modified version of Venkatasubramanian. The prevalence of this name is an indication that Lord Murugá has a consecrated presence in Thiruvenkata hills".

I felt a peculiar sweetness in his words. 'Even while speaking on humdrum subjects such interesting facts emerge'. I was filled with surprise.

Then Pillaivál turned to me and asked me what all I had learnt and from whom. I told him in some detail about my learning under different mentors - from Sadagopa Iyengár to Chenganam Viruddáchala Reddiár.

"To what extent is he trained in music?" he asked my father.

My father informed him that he had himself formally taught music to me. He also mentioned that I had learnt music under Ganam Krishna Iyer in Gurukula form.

"Do you know Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár of your town?" Pillaivál asked.

"I know him well. He had also undergone training for sometime under Ganam Krishna Iyer".

Test:

After learning about my background the great savant turned to me and asked me to recite any one verse from

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Nydatham. I was but a novice who had collected bits and pieces of Tamil knowledge from the rural hinterland. And he was an intellectual colossus. I did not have the courage to recite the verse. My body was trembling. I started sweating. My tongue was in a bind. I struggled for two-three minutes. Eventually I hesitantly started reciting the invocatory verse in Kalyáni rágá. I had hardly completed the first line, and Pillaivál interjected and corrected. I had learnt a wrong version by rote memory, and I could repeat only that version. I started trembling all the more. Even so I somehow completed the entire verse. As I was reciting the verse I kept observing his face. I was gripped by a fear that I might have caused him an aversion towards me. Fortunately there was no such sign on his face. This enthused me somewhat.

"Come on, recite one more verse", he said.

I recited the special prefatory verse of Nydatham ('nilavu pozhi thani kavigai') in Sáveri rágá. He asked me to repeat both the verses and give their meaning. When I started doing it my voice faltered.

"Don't be scared. Recite the verses boldly", he told me. I completed the job.

"Have you learnt *Nigandu*?" he asked.

I told him that I had learnt all the twelve sections.

After hearing me recite a few verses, he said: "It is good to memorize Nigandu. This practice has disappeared these days. And, nobody listens to me".

A Question-Mark:

At that point my father asked him, "I have entrusted him in your care. When can he commence his lessons?"

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Pillaivál remained silent for a few minutes. I thought that he was thinking something. At the same time I got scared that he might not accept me. Then he started speaking slowly.

"Some student or the other keeps coming here. They are very obedient when they come. Learn for some time. But when they develop an involvement in Tamil they quit. Some leave without even informing me. Some claim to visit their village and return soon, but they never show up again. Some make a pretense of learning for a while, part from me, and brag about that they had learnt under my care. Such half-hearted attempts confer no benefits on them or lend me any satisfaction. I have got frustrated by the attitude of such students. So I have to think hard before accepting any student".

There was gentleness and affection in his words. I could not discern what he thought of me. It left me in doubt and despair. He also narrated stories of some students who had left after a brief stint. 'Why is he telling me all this? Is he hinting that he is not inclined to accept me? In that case why is he speaking to me with such solicitude?' I was at a loss.

Dream realized:

My father remained undaunted. "He wouldn't be one such student, Ayyá. Has unifocal concentration on Tamil Studies. He will continue here for as long as it takes. He wouldn't stir anywhere without your approval. I vouch for it. His earlier teachers had urged me to entrust him in their care. After a lot of thought he had sought refuge in you with considerable enthusiasm. Struck by his yearning I have brought him here without any delay. I am entrusting him to you. Hereafter I would entertain no rights over him". He

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choked with emotion as he said this. I also said a few things, though not very coherently. I stammered out; my eyes grew moist; my face lost lustre.

Those around empathized with my father's entreaty and my request falteringly articulated. They told Pillaivál, " It appears that this boy would be a sincere and committed student. You should be gracious to accept him".

There was a new light in Pillaivál's face. The gleam in his face indicated that he had come to some conclusion and that his decision would be favourable to me.

"Do you have relatives here? Have you made any arrangements for his food?" Pillaivál asked.

"I have friends and relatives here, but they are not men of means. It would not be proper to burden them. We ourselves will have to make some arrangements", my father replied. He had known that Pillaivál has provided food and shelter to many of his students. This must have prompted him to have said what he did.

"Whenever a stay in Thiruvávaduthurai or Patteeswaram is involved, I can vouchsafe for his food requirements to be taken care of. As a vegetarian there should be no problem. He can have his food in my house itself. In this town, however, I am not in a position to be helpful in this matter; I am helpless and I am sorry."

"In that case, during his stay here I will somehow manage to raise funds for his food expenses. You should be kind enough to accept it."

"Alright. Let us commence the lessons on an auspicious day."

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I was elated that my long penance has been richly rewarded. As it was nearly sunset we took leave of him saying that we would return the next morning.

As we were leaving, a big load was off our chests. Appá kept asking me questions laced with concern and affection: "Will you take good care of yourself? Will you mind your health properly? Will you keep writing me letters? Don't be worrying".

His words betrayed his concern in leaving me alone in Máyuram.

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28. START OF LESSONS

I felt a sense of pride that I had joined the group of Pillaivál's students. That night Father and I visited the temple and offered worship to Sri Mayuranáthá and Abayámbiká. Sleep eluded me all night. With joy surging in me I restlessly visualized many a scene. Hope glistened in the depth of my being that my problems were really a thing of the past.

Dream and Benefit:

Father too spent a sleepless night. Reason – his concern that he was leaving me alone in a new place.

As soon as he woke up next morning, "Sámá", he called me out. "I had a dream last night. A venerable old couple came up to me, gave vibhoothi and kungumam and told me, 'Give this to your son; worry not about him'. That gave me a new assurance. I believe you would well and truly prosper. Nurse no worries". In fact I had no worries then. But Appá was providing a sop to his own worries by appearing to console me.

The day dawned. After completing the morning ritual observances we both went to Pillaivál's house. He was conversing with a few Saivite gentlemen in the front portion of his house. On seeing us, he greeted us warmly. It was different from the way he had received us the previous day

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which had a formal tone of receiving strangers. When he was greeting my father his eyes focused on me. His tone had a touch of affection and solicitude. It looked as if we had changed in his perception from outsiders to the inner circle.

"How was your night meal? Was the place convenient?" he asked.

"Everything is convenient. Last night we had darshan in the temple. I prayed for his welfare. I had a dream last night", said my father. "What was the dream?" asked Pillaivál. And my father explained the dream.

"This is a god omen. It is a practice here to refer to the deities Sri Mayuranáthar and Abayámbiká as old man and old woman. The divine couple have appeared in your dream. Hereafter you don't have to worry about your son. Everything will be alright".

Pillaivál provided his own interpretation of the dream.

My father was happy that Lord Mayuranáthan had himself appeared in his dream. For my part I was elated that Pillaivál himself had stated in my presence that Appá need not worry about me.

Fragments from experience:

At that point a gentleman joined us and shared some information about Ârumuga Návalar: Návalar leaving Chidambaram and reaching Jáffná; vidwáns and gentry of Jáffná receiving him at the seashore; giving him a rousing welcome; and other such matters. Another person referred to Rámalinga Vallalár in Vadalur and elaborated on many incidents there. Then Pillaivál enquired from my father about Ariyiloor and other places nearby. Father explained the support extended by the people there to vidwáns and

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that even poor people there tried to extend whatever help they could.

"We tend to dismiss such villages as mere uncivilized hinterland. But it is here that we find an abundance of compassion and love. The more 'civilization' grows self-centeredness increases. In these civilized places we rarely encounter persons of philanthropic disposition," Pillaivál said.

I learnt later that his words had risen from his own experiences.

Test:

We took leave, completed our lunch and returned to Pillaivál's house in the afternoon. He got a copy of Thirunágai Karona Puráná, handed it over to me and asked me to read out any verse from the text. I opened the text and started slowly reading in a musical tone verse 38 of Náttu Padalam, a typical opening chapter of a long poetical work dealing with the specific eco-region.

Punmai sálkizhangu agazhndhidum
Ammái theermani suraiyirum pssl agatriduvár
Vanmai meviyaráyinum mánbariyáre
Menmai mevishi poulenum izhindhadhái vidume

"The hunters in the mountainous Kurinji land dig out tubers for their food. In this process precious stones too come out. They toss them aside with crowbars and continue digging. For them the precious stones do not match the value of the tubers. However precious an item it is valueless in the hands of those ignorant of their value".

The verse deals with this matter. It is a poetic condition to incorporate such sentiments in the initial '*Náttu*

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varnanai'(description of the land) portion of Tamil epics. In this part the five eco-regions - *Kurinji*, *Pálai*, *Mullai*, *Marutam* and *Neytal* as appropriate, will be described, as also the typical happenings there. The verse referred to above deals with the nature and activities of hunters in the hilly Kurinji land. The verse also embodies in itself a general comment about human nature.

"Why don't you read the next verse also?". I read the verse:

Murivi ráyapaim pozhilarchem muzhumani noekki
Seriva theeyena kudávadi vaeru kán sendru
Piravi lávira vazhalena pirangavull
Aravilá renguch chárinung sugamadai yárál.

"A bear looks at a ruby in a grove choking with dense green foliage. Taking it to be a flame it runs in fright to another woods. The forest full of Jyothi trees glistens like flame in the night. 'Oh! This fire seems bent on chasing me', it was filled with despair. Joy would elude the ignorant wherever they go". This is the meaning of the verse.

Pillaivál explained the meaning for this verse too, and asked me to outline the meaning of both the verses. I repeated as I had heard from him. Then he raised a few minor grammar-related questions. I replied.

"To which type does this verse belong?"

"This is *Kali Nirai Thurai*".

"Can you parse this verse by breaking it into its constituent Seers or metrical feet?"

"I will try with my limited knowledge".

Then he recited a few *Vennpás* in a way that the metrical norm sounds distorted and asked me to separate the

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Seers in the Vennpá. I separated the Seers with a lot of care.

I separated the Seers in the following verse:

Nelluk kiraiththa neerváikkál vazhiyodi

Pullukku mángae posiyumám

I separated the *Seers* in a particular manner and parsed the verse. He raised the question if the alliterative *Monai* element would not be affected by the way I had separated the Seers. I clarified that the alternative implied by him could result in an impermissible mixing of '*Thalai*' or metrical rhythm.

"Good, good. You have learnt Tamil Prosody well."

"Reddiár had lucidly taught me these aspects while taking the *Kárigai* lesson."

Pillaivál paid handsome compliment to Reddiar's erudition.

I thought that Pillaivál had that day tested my knowledge of Tamil. With the satisfaction that I had learnt the meaning of two verses from Pillaivál himself, I felt happy that my learning under his feet had already commenced.

"Find out an auspicious day, let us commence the lessons soon," Pillaivál told my father. It appeared that he had a favourable impression about me.

'Today is an auspicious day; I have already started my lessons' I told myself. "Tomorrow is a good day. The lesson can be formally started," my father said.

"Very good. So we shall do." Pillaivál expressed his approval.

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Commencement of Lesson:

Next day I formally started my lessons. At first he started teaching me the grammar work Nydatham. He asked me to read a few verses and explained their meaning. He explained the special features of those verses and also highlighted the grammatical nuances. While I had already read the text a number of times, I had not received the kind of teaching offered by Pillaivál; I found his method of teaching very meaningful. While teaching he would tell the meaning of only those words beyond my grasp; would explain those aspects which were not clear to me.

After dealing with a few verses he said, "We would complete this text in a few days. Thereafter we will take up another text". Then he called out, "Appá, Saverináthu". One of his students appeared.

"From tomorrow you teach him Nydatham," He directed him. Accordingly I started learning under that student.

Saverinátha Pillai:

Saverinátha Pillai was his name. A Roman Catholic; was studying under Pillaivál. No one would find a Christian in him. He was wearing a thick coat of vibhoothi on his forehead. He had enormous devotion for Pillaivál. He was taking care of all the chores in the household; was always jovial; full of witty remarks. The way he spoke readily dispelled gloom or anger. Of friendly disposition; explained the meaning of verses in an engaging manner; would often branch off into chatting about other matters. It was a pleasure spending time with him.

My first impression was that his learning lacked depth. I could not appreciate his cleverness in dealing with academic matters. I was not inclined merely to spend time in a

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jolly manner; I was all eagerness to learning new things. I had already studied Naidatham. He dealt with this text in an interesting manner, but I learnt no new aspects of grammar or new concepts. This left me somewhat cold. I found that in some places he was not even aware of the things I had already known.

When he was taking lessons, I would interject and ask him, "What is the *Alankáram* or the figure of speech in this verse?" he wouldn't know. "Should check it up" would be his evasive answer. The commentary appended to the text indicated the Alankáram of the verse. "How is this Alankáram reflected in this verse?" I would ask him to explain. He couldn't explain it to my satisfaction. Instead of his asking me questions, it turned out that I had to keep asking him questions to get my doubts resolved.

'I had to surmount so much of difficulties to land here. Still I am not able to be Pilaivál's direct student. My bad luck appears to be tailing me wherever I go.' I was filled with grief.

I started wondering how to get over this problem.

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29. FATHER TAKES LEAVE

On the third day after landing in Máyuram, I was filled with joy that my lessons had commenced. "Sámá, it is a good omen that you have started learning Nydatham today. People read Naidatham to be rid of the difficulties associated with Kali, the era of misfortune. We may rest assured that our bad days are behind us." My father told me. I too believed likewise. After all, all the efforts of men are dictated by hope.

With the joy of having started the lesson, father and I returned home and had our lunch. He was taking rest in the thinnai. I sat by his side and was reading some book.

Seeing Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár:

Then an old man was walking along the street with a bamboo staff in his hand. On seeing him my father immediately rose from the thinnai and exclaimed, "Oh! Bhárathiár?" The old man looked at my father and said, "Who? Venkatasubbayyar? What brings you here?" He came and sat on the thinnai. As directed by Appá I paid obeisance to the elderly gentleman.

"Who is this boy?"

"My son."

"What is he doing? Learning music?"

"Yes. Also learning Tamil. I have brought him here so that he could learn under Mahá Vidwán Meenákshisundaram Pillai".

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"Really? Very good. Meenákshi Sundaram Pillai is a great savant; a noble person; a benefactor; a fine poet. But he is an enemy of music. He has an aversion for music vidwáns".

I was not inclined to believe Bhárathiár. I was surprised at Bhárathiár's ungainly looks. I could not connect his bent frame with his reputation. 'Has this person composed Nandanár Charitram?' I wondered. When I saw him I could not nurse towards him the esteem I had for the Nandanár text. I was not pleased by his unattractive presence and also his cynical remarks. Even so I noted the respect my father bestowed on him, and chose to be respectful too.

"How far has he learnt music? Has he learnt Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás?"

"I have taught him to the extent I know. He can sing some of the Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás I know".

"Really ! it is so long since I listened to those keerthanás. Come on, young man. Why don't you sing '*Kusuma Kunthalámbigayae*' keerthaná?" Bhárathiár told me. I sang that piece.

"Good. Boy has a good voice. Shouldn't waste it. Should learn more and more". He also asked me to sing a few other keerthanás. I sang. Father also sang a few pieces. We also sang a few keerthanás together.

"Who sings such keerthanás here? It is so nice to hear this boy sing so well".

"All due to the benediction of persons of eminence like you. I am planning to leave him here. Please be good enough to teach him some music", my father requested Bhárathiár.

"No problem. It would also help me pass time", he agreed.

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My father and Bhárathiár were chatting for a long time about the good old days. I could see that Bhárathiár was deeply interested in Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás. My father told him that he would visit him in his house, and Bhárathiár took leave.

Learning music under Bhárathiár:

The next morning my father and I went to Bhárathiár's house. Those days he was living in his student Ramasámi Iyer's house. Ramasámi Iyer had been offering his services in Mayuranátha Sámi temple.

I started my music lessons that very day. I used to go to Bhárathiár's house almost every morning; in the evenings too on some days. I went with him in the afternoon to Lágadam on the Káveri bank to perform s*andyávandanam*. A munsiff court was then functioning at Lágadam. Vedanáyakam Pillai was the munsiff in Máyuram. I had heard that he was a Tamil vidwán. Occasionally I had observed him in the court from a distance.

The more I moved with Bhárathiár the more I realized what a great soul he was. His voice was weak. So he was learning violin over the past few years; he used to enjoy himself playing on the violin whenever he was alone. In the morning and in the evening he used to perform yoga meditation in the Agastheeswara Swámi sannidi in Mayuranátha temple.

He had a flair for humour and for narrating stories. He had a knack of relating words to one Puráná story or another. Time took to its wings in his company. Proverbs flowed freely whenever he spoke.

I learnt many keerthanás from him, including his own compositions. He taught me the correct tune, rágá and beat

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for his *Nandanár Charitra keerthanás*. Sometimes his disciple Ramasámi Iyer also taught me some keerthanás.

Many music vidwáns from Máyuram and neighbouring places often called on Bhárathiár. Máyuram had its own share of music vidwáns: Sáthanur Panju Iyer, Gottu Vádyam Krishna Iyer, Thirutthuraippoondi Bhágavathar and Periya Ramasámi Iyer. As Vedanáyakam Pillai was the munsiff there, the clerks and lawyers under his jurisdiction used to sing his compositions to curry favour with him. They learnt music only for this purpose. All these people visited Bhárathiár.

Food Arrangement:

My father stayed on in Máyuram for a few days. During those days he called on all the persons known to him and requested them to take care of me. Till he was there I took my food in my paternal uncle's in-laws' place. My aunt also happened to be there. Realizing that it would not be quite proper for me to be taking food in their household on a long-term basis my father started making alternative arrangements.

A sixty-year old widow from Mahádána Street used to prepare and serve food for a few officials and school boys, and eked out a humble living. The morning fare for the school boys was '*paẓhayadhu*', cooked rice kept soaking overnight in water; hot and wholesome food was served for lunch and dinner. She charged only five rupees per month. My aunt Lakshmiammál requested the old lady to take good care of me.

Appá gave me money for my expenses. Then he took leave of his friends. The night before he left he gave me a lot of advice - how I should conduct myself, how I should take

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good care of my health and not fail in my oil bath schedule. He repeated this over and over again.

Taking Leave:

On the day of his departure he accompanied me to Pillaivál's house.

"I am planning to leave for my village today. Please grant me leave, " Father told him.

"Why? You may as well spend a few more days and enjoy the darshan of Mayuranátha Swámi."

"How long can I stay in another's house? This place is not convenient for my poojá and other observances. Further, I have no other work here. My main work has been accomplished with divine grace and your benediction. I have entrusted this boy to you. I am confident that he is on his road to progress. Should I not devote my time to my own duties?"

"Ok. I see your point. Don't forget us."

"I have no more worries about him. While I am clear on this, a nameless concern lurks in my mind. I have never been separated from him. Even if he is separated for a day his mother loses herself in gloom. I have a certain unease in going away from him. He is not used to taking care of himself without other's help. I beseech you to accept a parent's role and bestow your parental care on him."

While saying this Appá's eyes grew moist. Till then I had never seen him so visibly concerned about me and my welfare. His affection for me lying buried in his heart broke its banks. On seeing tears in his eyes, I was also moved; tears welled up in my eyes. I was overcome by grief.

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Realizing the depth of father's love for me, Pillaivál broke into a benign smile and told him, "You need have no worry about his safety and welfare. I will take good care of him. You may return to your village with calm courage. Whenever you feel like seeing him, I'll send him to your place. You can also visit us often."

My father got ready to leave. I walked some distance with him to bid him farewell. Only after he left I felt that I was overwhelmed by a strange grief. I felt the pangs of separation from Ammá and Appá - something I had not felt earlier.

If my father, endowed as he was with fortitude and a power to endure worries, was so worried, how disconsolate would be Ammá. This thought filled me with anguish. I recalled the poignancy when I returned home to Kunnam after a separation of a mere four days. I saw in my mind's eye how Ammá hugged me fondly and sobbed uncontrollably.

When I returned after seeing off my father, Pillaivál consoled me with warmth; he spoke to me with soothing words to counter my grief.

"In a few days we will have to go to Thiruvávaduthurai. There the Mutt Head '*Sannidánam*' would be happy to see you. If he learns about your musical training he would lavish special attention on you." He shared with me matters concerning Thiruvávaduthurai Adheenam and other interesting pieces of information. His words assuaged my sorrow.

In due course all these worries disappeared in a tide of Tamil nectar.

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30. A ROUTE TO AFFECTION

When I was learning Nydatham under Saverinátha Pillai, Pillaivál occasionally noticed my raising questions during the lessons. When he struggled without knowing answer to my questions Pillaivál would tell him, "What Saverináthu? Should you not be in the know of these things? He has learnt some of these things by himself." Such comments filled me with satisfaction. It was not born out of Mahá Vidwán's complimenting my ability; it was a satisfaction that he was aware of Saverinátha Pillai's lack of ability to teach me properly.

Youthful Zest:

Whenever Pillaivál was around I used to frequently raise questions with Saverinátha Pillai. My objective was to somehow get Pillavál to teach me directly. Saverinátha Pilla never got angry by my questions. Anyone in his place would have ensured that I fell out of favour with Pillaivál. In any case, my desire and youthful zest formed an alliance; but Saverinátha Pillai's essential good nature prevailed. He didn't find it improper or demeaning that I raised those questions. He moved genially with me; full of sweet words. He also dwelt at length on Pillaivál's greatness and the many interesting incidents since he came under Pillaivál's tutelage.

Naidatham lessons were continuing. As I did not learn directly under Pillaivál, I had limited opportunity to move with him. I was also scared to express my desire to learn directly under him.

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Tending the Garden:

Pillaivál had bought the house with his hard-earned income. At the back of the house there was an expansive garden and a pond nearby. He was a lover of Nature. The poet in him eagerly savoured the sites of emerald lawns, flower-studded pond, woods full of trees of dense foliage and salubrious river banks. He was keen to raise a nice garden at the back of his new house. With his keen involvement in performing Shiva poojá, he wanted to raise a lot of flower plants in the garden.

It was a practice in those parts to uproot small plants of citrus and mango trees without disturbing the soil stuck to them, to cover the soil with twisted hay and plant them in deep pits. Pillaivál had procured such plants and kept them in the garden. This process was on when I joined him.

Surveying the tender shoots:

My teacher visited the garden every morning and evening and inspected the plants. He anxiously checked if any of them had got withered; he keenly looked for any plant putting forth new shoots. If any plant had got withered his heart lamented as if a valued treasure had been lost. The look of a new shoot transported him to cloud nine. He would often instruct the servants to guard them carefully. During the evenings he would himself water a few plants.

I observed this daily loving action of his. I realized his immense love for the plants. I thought I could utilize his plants to worm my way into his heart.

I woke up early next morning. Even without cleaning my teeth I went straight to the garden. I closely observed any and every plant. There were new shoots in a few plants. I made a careful note of this. In a short while my teacher ap-

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peared there. He started looking eagerly for tender shoots. I gingerly walked up to him. As I had already done my share of inspection, I told him, "There are tender sprouts in this branch".

He didn't have time to think why I had come there; nor did he ask me. "Where? Where is it?" He was all eagerness in looking at the branch I had pointed to. He was elated on seeing the sprouts. He thought a plant nearby had got withered. But a tiny sprout was gently raising its dainty head in one hidden corner of the plant. I thought Pillaivál would be delighted to see it. And I told him, "Here, this plant has also put forth a tender shoot". No sooner I said this than Pillaivál exclaimed, "What? You mean this plant? I thought it had withered away beyond redemption. A sprout here? Where? Let's see". He rushed towards that plant. The sprout eluded his eyes. I pointed it out to him. The tiny sprout filled him with sheer joy. I felt a resonant joy. A hope rose in my heart that my effort would soon bear fruit. I blessed that tender shoot.

I did not stop there. I also showed Pillaivál the many other shoots I had noted. Every sprout I showed left him dizzy with delight.

It was a sure signal. I continued my voyage of discovery of tender shoots every morning. On some days this research continued even in the evenings. Pillaivál too savoured the sight of newer and newer shoots.

Sprouting of affection:

One day, while returning after inspecting all the plants, he turned towards me and asked me, "Has anybody asked you to inspect these plants?"

"Not really. I am doing it on my own."

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"Why? What for?"

"I observe that 'Ayyá Avargal'* has been inspecting it everyday. I thought that if I scan the garden earlier and inform you there would be lesser strain on you. That's why."

In the normal circumstances I wouldn't have spoken to him so boldly. As I had managed to establish a bridgehead with him over the past few days with tender shoots as a pretext, I had developed some courage. I was also confident of winning his affection totally in due course.

"Good, good. It would sure be convenient if you inspect the garden on a daily basis", he told me. His endorsement of my initiative encouraged me a great deal.

The opportunity to meet and speak to him every morning was the main benefit for me. His interest in my welfare increased gradually. He also spoke to me about the progress in my studies. "How are the lessons progressing? How far have you come? How many verses did you cover yesterday?" He raised such questions laced with interest. I replied him appropriately.

Completion of Nydatham Lessons:

Our conversations gradually helped develop a bond between us. One day, I hesitantly aired my interest in learning lessons directly under him. "First complete the Nydatham lessons. Thereafter we will start some other text".

These words of his lifted a big load off my chest. I could not wait to see the completion of Naidatham lessons.

While Saverinátha Pillai dealt with the few verses I urged him to take a few more verses. I was extremely eager

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* *Ayyá Avargal: It was the practice to refer to Pillaivál as Ayyá Avargal. This term was used while addressing him.*

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to complete this text and commence direct lessons under Pillaivál.

How long can Naidatham drag on? Curtain had to be brought down on it one day. It was over in a few days. That very day I rushed to Pillaivál and told him, "Naidatham lessons have been completed".

"Ok. Tomorrow I will take up some Prabandam lessons", he told me.

First Lesson:

Next morning he himself called me and said, "I am thinking of teaching you *Thirukkudanthai Thiruvandháthi*". He handed over the palm-script text. The lesson started.

Thirukkudanthai Thiruvandháthi had been authored by Pillaivál himself. It deals with Sri Kumbeshwarar, the consecrated deity of Kumbakonam. As a *Thiruvandháthi* it was a difficult text. That very day my guru dealt with forty verses from the text. I had not come across till then any teacher who could handle in one day more than five or six verses of *Thiribu Yamaga Andháthi*. Pillaivál's teaching method was different. He did not elaborate with embellishments such as similes. He offered explanations only when clarification was required. He dealt with special features of the text as also grammatical nuances. He had an uncanny capacity to discern which aspect was beyond the student's comprehension. As I read the text he explained only those portions not clear to me. He left untouched what I had understood. 'How has he found out that I have not understood this aspect', I used to be filled with surprise. As a person who had spent a lifetime teaching students, he was peerless in his ability to quickly divine every student's intellectual level and tailor his teaching accordingly.

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A Treasure Trove:

His teaching did not have the character of a discourse. Some teachers like Ariyiloor Sadagopa Iyengár elaborated on the meanings of verses and captivated the students. Pillaivál's approach was different. Those teachers appeared like the ones who held secure their limited wealth. While dispensing money they took out coin by coin, displayed each coin and handed over to the students. On the other hand Pillaivál lavished on his students his unbounded treasure. Not brass coins, but gold sovereigns. That too in abundant heaps. The wealth transfer depended upon the passion of the receiver. The more the zest the more the benefit. There was no question of scarcity.

Food to match appetite:

My hunger for Tamil was insatiable. When I heard lessons from others it was like receiving handfuls of popcorn for elephantine hunger. Then, I came to Pillaivál; what a marvel! I was served a grand feast, delectable Tamil feast. Food to match my hunger. Sometimes, even exceeding the demands of hunger. Even before learning one verse of *Thiruvarangatthu Andháthi* from Amirda Kaviráyar, how all he made me sweat! With no heart to share anymore, how he scampered. I compared that experience with this pleasure. 'Oh! What a difference! No wonder so many persons had told me, ' Go to Pillaivál, your prayers will be answered'. Tamil treasure has started unfolding', I exulted.

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31. HOW FORTUNATE!

I completed listening to Thirukkudanthai Thiruvandháthi lessons in only two days. My teacher gave me a bunch of palm leaves and a stylus and asked me to take a copy of the text. It was a time when printed books were very rare. I had inscribed in palm leaves most of the texts I had learnt. Thanks to this practice I developed an ability to write fast and legibly on palm leaf.

Saverinátha Pillai and a staunch Saivite by name Kanagasabai Iyer also learnt lessons along with me. Kanagasabai Iyer was running a school in Koorai Nádu.

Andháthis:

While learning Kudanthai Thiruvandháthi, I got to know that Pillaivál himself had authored it. 'What a great fortune to earn a text from its author himself!' I relished the very thought. I had learnt from Saverinátha Pillai that Pillaivál had composed many *Prabhandams* and *Puranás*. I was particularly happy at the prospect of learning from Pillaivál himself all of his literary creations.

After completing *Kudanthai Thiruvandháthi*, *Pazhamalai Thiruvandháthi* was taken up. Thuraimangalam Sivaprakása Swámigal was its author. I had already heard a lot about his reputation from the places he had frequented and developed a lot of respect for him. So, when I started learning this text, old scenes unfolded in my mind. I remembered the ponds sanctified by his bathing there. I thought of his descendants. I had the good fortune of being taught a poetic work by another distinguished poet.

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Pillaivál started the lesson after a laudatory reference. "Sivaprakása Swámigal was a great poet; a person of great imagination. Scholars respectfully refer to him as Kavitha Sárva Boumar. There was a practice to call his Gangai Kovai as Mandiri(minister) Kovai and Thiruchitrambala Kovai as Raja (king) Kovai. The Prabandam called Sona Saiva Málai is a beautiful piece of work. Every verse had a speck of fancy. It is believed that within one round of Giri Pradakshana in Thiruvannámalai, Swámigal had completed composing hundred verses." With this introduction Pillaivál started the lesson. Is it not heartening to hear a poet heaping effusive praise on another poet with no trace of jealousy!

Grandeur would emerge gradually:

The information about Sivaprakásar composing hundred verses within one round of Thiruvannámalai hills, filled me with surprise. While speaking to Saverinátha Pillai after the lesson, I told him: "I have seen the places said to have been frequented by Sivaprakása Swámigal. In the places near Venganur people still recount in awe his greatness. But I have heard about this incident only from 'Ayyá Avargal'. It is difficult enough to find a teacher covering hundred verses in one lesson. Imagine composing in one go hundred verses surcharged with aesthetic value. He was no doubt divine".

"Surprising indeed! We experience this surprise here too. Pillaivál is not second to Sivaprakásar. Not one hundred, not even two hundred but many hundreds of beautiful verses he can compose in one fluent stretch. You would know about it by and by", Saverinátha Pillai told me. I kept expectantly waiting for such an opportunity.

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Scheduling Lessons:

Pazhamalai Thiribu Andháthi was completed; Thirupugalur Thiribu Andháthi was started. My teacher had a special liking for the compositions of one Nerkkundravána Mudaliár. While teaching the text, at the end of every verse he would exclaim, "Oh! What diction! What beauty!" At the conclusion of this Prabandam I learnt *Maraisai Andháthi*. That lesson was completed in one day. After the Thiribu Andathi I heard lessons on Pillaivál's own compositions: *Thillai Yamaga Andháthi*; *Thuraisai Yamaga Andháthi* and *Thiruvogaththu Yamaga Andháthi*.

In the old days Andháthis were initially taught to the students to help develop their skills in separating words, learning new words and memorizing the verses. I learnt likewise alongwith Saverinátha Pillai and other disciples.

After the Andháthis, *Pillai Thamizh* texts were taken up.(Pillai Thamizh is a poem celebrating the different stages in the infancy and childhood of a hero comprising ten parts) I was in cloud nine. Earlier I had had only desultory access to parts of text and a few verses. At that point, with hardly any effort on my part, I got a number of Prabandam texts. I was listening to lessons with no trace of fatigue. These texts included *Meenakshiammai Pillai Thamizh*, *Muthukumárasámi Pillai Thamizh*, *Senkazhuneer Pillai Thamizh* and *Amudámbikai Pillai Thamizh*. *Thiribu Andháthi*? One, two, three and four. *Yamaga Andháthi*? Two or three of its kind. Pillai Thamizh? Not less than five. I had also listened to lessons on five of the eight Prabandams authored by Pillai Perumál Iyengár. I could barely believe the galloping pace of my learning. I had never dreamt that I would one day learn lessons at this pace. How true were Viruddáchala Reddiár's words: "We are mere springs in a

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well in highlands. He is flowing Káveri." The flow of Kaveri? No, I should call it the raging waters of Ganga. Maybe, even this is not appropriate. I should call it, 'Opening the floodgates of ocean'. On completing each Prabhandam, in the immense satisfaction of having savoured it, I felt like exclaiming, "Oh! How blessed am I!"

Born Mentor:

While teaching, my teacher never held a text in his hand. All the verses were etched in his memory. He spent most of the time presenting the verses fluently, stating the meaning and highlighting the essence of the verses. He is born to spread knowledge, I would think. He would never tire of teaching lessons.

We derived many kinds of benefits while learning under his feet. Apart from explaining the meaning of the verses, he also dwelt on the history of the author. He recited many related stray verses. In between he shared many interesting matters, as appropriate to the circumstance. All these were valuable nuggets of information. Even while rolling the lessons in our mind, we used to sit by his side. He spoke to us fondly and inquired about our welfare too. This filled our hearts.

Genuine Love:

Every day when I returned after food, Pillaivál would inquire, "Have you had your meal? Was the food tasty and wholesome?" He would urge me to have regular oil bath. One day oil was brought to Pillaivál for his oil bath. I was then by his side. He looked at me closely and told me, "You look haggard. Your eyes are ruddy. Better have oil bath". He handed over some oil to me. I immediately left, had a nice oil bath, finished my meal and returned. Pillaivál looked at me and told a person by his side, "How does he look now?

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Does not his face look bright?" The glow in my face appeared to have pleased him more than it pleased me.

If he realized that I was in need of something, he would immediately get it for me. If I was late in returning after my meal, he would be concerned why I was late. This concern used to be all the more after nightfall; he would sit on the thinnai and be eagerly awaiting my arrival. "Why so late? I was worried," he would tell me with genuine concern. I was deeply moved by such affectionate concern. Bathed in his love and savouring the Tamil nectar, my grief of separation from my parents did not last long. I started feeling that a similar separation from Pillaivál would have hurt me a lot more.

Apart from the time I spent on music lessons with Gopálakrishna Bhárathiár and for my meals, I spent all the time with Ayyá Avargal. I slept in his house. It was a fulfilling togetherness.

Change of Name:

One day Pillaivál happened to ask me, "Why have they named you Venkataráman?" "Venkatachalapathy is our family deity. So every male in the family has Venkata as prefix," I informed him. I could guess that he was not overly pleased with that name.

"Do you have any other name?" he asked.

"I am called Sámá in my house."

"Is there any such name?"

"That's not a full name. It is a shortened version of Sámináthan."

"Really? Sámináthan is such a nice name. I am inclined to call you by this name. You can also henceforth

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adopt that name."

I agreed to do so. The name Venkataráman got transformed as Sáminátha from that day. In line with Pillaivál's desire everyone started calling me Sáminátha. The name dear to my respected teacher got stuck.

For the next few days the changed name landed me in some confusion. Whenever anyone called me as Sáminátha Iyer, I could not readily feel that I was being addressed. Should anyone ask me my name I was instinctively tempted to say Venkataráman. I would immediately collect myself and say Sáminátha. In due course the new name was widely accepted.

Work as Pastime:

Pillaivál's was an old house. He decided to change the roof tiles. He used to stay around and supervise the work. I chipped in and helped hand over the tiles. "You may not be used to such work," the teacher told me. "Me? I am a village boy. I can do such jobs well". I made him rest and looked after the work. I prepared bamboo splits. Saverinátha Pillai also joined me in the work.

A new well was being dug in the garden. Pillaivál tugged up his dhoti and got ready to haul away the muddy water from the well. He started sweating profusely after transferring only one pail of water. When I saw him struggle with his belly wobbling jelly-like, I rushed towards him and took the pail from him and helped haul the muddy water. I performed such chores with enthusiasm. With my time mainly devoted to studies, I found the chores a pleasant diversion. Is not any work performed with enthusiasm, a pastime in itself?

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"Sáminátha Iyer works tirelessly. Seems to know all kinds of work". Pillaivál would praise me. As the compliment was born of genuine affection, it left me very pleased.

Useful Habits:

Many persons kept calling on Pillaivál. Men of distinction came; savants came; on those occasions other students and I stood nearby. During Pillaivál's conversations with those visitors. many nuggets of interesting and useful information flowed from him. Our teacher would introduce us to the visitors. He would ask us to recite some verse and also state their meaning. As I recited the verses musically, he would often ask me to recite the verses. Thanks to this practice I developed an assurance to recite verses without any reserve. I also developed the practice of explaining the meaning of verses.

One day a scholar by name Dharmadánapuram Kannuvayyar had come. He had a reputation for delivering Mahábhárathá discourses. He eked out a living by delivering discourses on Villiputhurázhwár Bháratham and collecting honoraria. He held Pillaivál in high esteem. During the discourses he would recite Bháratham verses musically and in a powerful voice. I had not heard such discourses earlier. I savoured it avidly.

On another occasion a scholar by name Sabhapathi Iyer had come. He had learnt lessons from Ezhumbur Thiruvenkatáchala Mudaliár. His discourses focused on Rámáyaná. As per the wishes of Sália dignitaries from Koorai Nádu he was delivering daily discourses on Kamba Rámáyaná. During his visit he had long discussions with Pillaivál on Kamba Rámáyaná; also got some of his doubts clarified.

We also derived benefit by listening to our teacher's discussions with the visiting scholars. On realizing that we

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were Pillaivál's students the visiting scholars and dignitories tended to bestow affection on us. I was then the youngest among these students; so they had a special affection towards me.

So blossomed my *Gurukula* phase, blessed by new knowledge, affection of many persons and the pleasure of growing.

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32. TAMIL'S BENEDICTION

My teacher did not initially know that I was learning music under Gopála Krishna Bhárathiár. I had also not informed him. Pillaivál and Gopála Krishna Bhárathiár were friends. As Bhárathiár was a great Shiva devotee, my teacher held him in esteem; not for his musical prowess. Pillaivál felt that he did not have significant knowledge of Tamil. He felt that Bhárathiár's Nandanár Charitra keerthanás had many grammatical errors; so he had no great regard for it as a literary text. Even so he was drawn to the devotional intensity of the work and offered it a special preface in verse.

Secret Unveiled:

These two great men used to meet occasionally. During one such meeting, Pillaivál told Bhárathiár, "A Brahmin boy has joined me as a student; he recites verses with musical elan. You must hear him once and bless him". He thought that Bhárathiár would be pleased to hear Tamil verses being recited musically.

"I know that boy very well. He learns music under me every morning. I also know that he is taking lessons from you. It is indeed nice if music joins hands with Tamil", Bhárathiár said. It sounded as if it was Pillaivál's shortcoming that his Tamil erudition lacked musical finesse.

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Pillaivál was surprised on hearing this. He took leave of Bhárathiár immediately and came straight to his house. I was with my friends in one part of the house, reading some text. He rushed towards me and asked, "Are you learning music under Mudikondán Bhárathiár?." The question unsettled me. It was my mistake that I was learning music without informing him about it. Even so I didn't have the courage to inform him. Bhárathiár had already told me that Pillaivál was not favourably disposed towards music. To the extent I had moved with my teacher I had not found any musical interest in him. This was the cause of my reserve. Till the going was good I was covertly paying obeisance to the god of music.

Under these circumstances I was taken aback when the cat was out of the bag. 'How do I handle Ayyá Avargal's question?' "My father had asked me to learn music so that I don't lose touch with my musical knowledge." I stammered out an answer. The savant whose love was exclusively reserved for Tamil literature and grammar, told me, "I had not known about this till now. Involvement with music can deflect your interest from grammar and literature". Having said this he left.

He was right:

I did not venture to examine the correctness of his position. I readily realized the truth in Bhárathiár's earlier comment about him. I decided to forgo my training in music. From the very next day I stopped going to Bhárathiár for my musical lessons.

I was not overly bothered by this development. 'Music is my family inheritance. I don't have to struggle hard for it. But knowledge of Tamil is a great treasure.' So everything else paled into insignificance before Tamil.

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Then I met Bhárathiár and told him, "There is a heavy load of Tamil texts to be studied. It appears that it would be difficult to come here everyday for musical training. Whenever I find time I'll come and have your darshan."

Seekázhi Kovai:

The Tamil lessons continued regularly. I learnt many Prabanthams. In the midst of a lesson one day my teacher told me, "We will next take up *Kánchi Puránam*; a fine text. You can learn a lot of valuable things through it". He had a lot of interest in that text. For some reason he did not commence that lesson.

"Have you read any *Kovai* text?" he asked me.

"I have read *Thirukovaiyár* and *Thanjaivánan Kovai*".

"Now we can learn *Seekázhi Kovai*."

"I already know one verse from that Kovai text," I told him.

"How did you get to know it?"

"I understand that my father's younger brother had once called on you during a visit to Máyuram. At that point he had occasion to observe Ayyá Avargal teaching Seekázhi Kovai to a few students. When Ayyá Avargal was teaching a verse starting, '*Atre Malarkuzhal*', my uncle readily committed it to memory. On return to our village he recounted the verse to me. I committed it to my memory then and there." I also recited htat verse.

"Good. You can now learn the entire text."

The text of that Kovai was not readily available. Pillaivál's copy was with someone else. "Kanagasabhai Iyer of Koorai Nádu has a copy; but he would not easily part with it. I'll get it from someone else," he told me.

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After his lunch my teacher retired for his usual siesta.

Koorai Nádu was about two miles from Máyuram. Making sure that my teacher was about to sleep I made a dash to Koorai Nádu, walking and running. I left with the resolve to somehow get a copy of that text from Kanagasabhai Iyer. I managed to coax him into lending me a copy of that text. With a view to making sure that I returned before Pillaivál woke up, I ran back to Máyuram. It was a hot afternoon. But the severity of the sun and the fatigue of having scampered two miles back and forth disappeared under the pleasure of having got the Kovai text.

When Pillaivál woke up I stood in front of him with the palm manuscript in hand.

"What text is this?" he asked.

"Seekázhi Kovai".

"How come?"

"Kanagasabhai Iyer's"

"When did you get it?"

"Just now Ayyá"

"Why did you go in this hot sun? He wouldn't give that easily. I would have myself got it for you."

He realized that I had been impelled by my fervour to start the Kovai lesson without any loss of time. He immediately started the lesson.

Seekázhi Kovai had been composed by Pillaivál himself. When his friend Vedanáyakam Pillai was Seekázhi munsiff my teacher had spent some time with him. At that point he had composed this Kovai. It had a more extensive form as compared to the other Kovai texts.

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While taking the lesson, Pillaivál would often draw parellels from Thirukovaiyár and other Kovai texts and highlight the nuances. A typical *Kovai Prabandam* unfolds like a story; dwells upon the life of love of the hero and the heroine. So the lessons would flow smoothly without any hurdle. While learning the *Andháthi* and *Pillai Thamizh* texts I used to get confounded occasionally; clarity evaded my grasp. No such hassle in *Seekázhi Kovai*.

This Kovai has as its protagonist Sri Brammapureesar consecrated in Seekázhi. As a Shiva devotee, Pillaivál had lavished wholesome praise on Lord Shiva in that Prabandam. While dealing with the text he would refer to the main elements of a Prabandam text, and also highlight the subtleties of Akam Prosodies. He mentioned that it was a poetic tradition, to refer to the gentle smile of the heroine(varidhu nagai thotrál) appearing in the initial part of the Kovai as the poet's statement. During my later Tamil research, I found this structure in many Kovai texts. In some texts, however, it appeared as the hero's statement.

When Seekázhi Kovai lessons were ongoing I learnt from Saverinátha Pillai that this book was formally launched with the help of Seekázhi munsiff Vedanáyakam Pillai. He also mentioned that Pillai had composed a few laudatory verses. Here is one fine verse:

Vidhiyedhiril Arizhadhalor pugal pugali Eesare Vinnor mannor

Thudhipodhipal pámálai petrippeer Meenakshisundarap pár

Madhizhadhiyan Kovaiyaip poelpetreerkol ikkázhi parap pil needhi

Yadhipadhi nám yena variveer Namizhannan sathiyaman, aria kooveere.

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(O Lord consecrated in Seekázhi. You must have received many garlands of verses. Still, have you received one like the Kovai created by Meenákshisundaram Pillai? You know that I preside over the judicial administration of Seerkázhi Circle. Tell me truthfully.)

Saverinátha Pillai spoke highly of Vedanáyakam Pillai. "It was he who suggested that I should become Pillaivál's student. He had great affection and respect towards Pillaivál. His verses are in limpid style with occasional clever turn of phrases." I was surprised that a person in a senior government position had so much involvement in Tamil.

During hot afternoons Pillaivál used to sit near the pond at the back of his house and take lessons. As that portion had tiled roof we were protected from the fury of the sun. He enjoyed taking lessons in that cool shade. I heard lessons on Seekázhi Kovai mostly from that place. It was completed in a few days. What I heard from my teacher was of considerable use to me during my future Tamil research.

I had given up on musical training and was exclusively immersed in Tamil. My disconnect with formal musical training did not appear as a loss to me. I found it beneficial to be focussing on Tamil instead of channeling my time and energy in two directions.

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33. EMBODIMENT OF AFFECTION

While taking lessons my teacher used to highlight the special grammatical features found in different verses. Whenever he came across a rare word he would draw parallels from the other texts and clarify the meaning. He asked us to carefully note the formation of rhyme and alliteration in the verses. As a poet he was fully aware of the hurdles encountered by those aspiring to compose verses. He taught us how to avoid or overcome such hurdles.

The Art of Composing Verses:

"Before composing a verse one should be clear in one's mind about the message and thrust of the verse. One should learn how to commence a verse to avoid getting mired in the course of composition. One should visualize the structure of the rhyme before employing it. One should not commence the verse carelessly and then try to massage the lines later. One should not rush into defining the substance of the first line and then struggle for a meaningful continuity in the fourth line. One should visualize and determine a continuing thrust of the entire verse." His teaching contained many such pieces of counsel.

After completing his ritual observances, he was sitting on his house thinnai one evening. Kanagasabhai Iyer, Saverinátha Pillai and I were standing by his side. He asked us, "Are you used to composing verses?" The other two

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had learnt lessons from him over an extended period. They answered in the affirmative. 'Is it proper for me to tell this great poet that I too can compose verses?' I was initially hesitant. At the same time, I did not feel like saying 'no' while the other two had said 'yes'. So I too replied, "I too can".

"If I give you the last line of a verse can you suitably fill up the other lines?" the teacher asked.

"We'll try", we replied.

Immediately he gave three separate end-lines for three Venpás. Saverinátha Pillai was a Christian; therefore, the end-line was '*Devá, Enakku Arulai Chei*' (O Lord, bestow grace on me). For Kanagasabhai Iyer the last line was '*Chinthá kulan thavira chei*' (rid me of my worries). For me it was,' *Kandá, Kadambá*, Gugá(an invocation to Lord Muruga). We thought carefully and somehow completed the Venpás.

Prayer to me:

We all recited our respective Vennpás. After listening to us he said, "I have also composed a Vennpá.

'Páda padikka payaná ni nakkanbu
Kooda karunai kozhithu arulvái-thedavarum
Mandhá nilanthavazhu Máyoora mánagarvázh
Kandá Kadambá Guhá.

(O Kandá Kadambá Guhá
With abode in Máyuram the city great
Caressed by breeze salubrious!
Bestow thy grace on us.
To learn the lessons as songs joyous
To offer unto you our salutation.)

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He also recited the Vennpá. I realized that he had also composed a verse along with us, mainly to provide us encouragement. The great savant who treated Tamil as a pleasurable pastime, was also teaching us Tamil in a delectable manner. Does not a Father play with the sons to provide them additional joy? Likewise, he also joined us in composing verses.

The three of us were delighted to hear his verse. My joy was a notch higher. He adopted the same final line of the Vennpá that he had given me for the exercise. Does it not show the depth of his affection for me? Is that all? While the verse was the composition of a poet, was not its substance a prayer from a student? 'To sing, to study and to enhance involvement', everyone should pray to god. But my teacher had prayed on these lines long years ago and had reaped his benefit. So there was no need for him to repeat the prayer. Like a mother partaking of a medicine for the sake of her child, he had prayed to Lord Kandá of Máyuram on my behalf to help me progress in singing, studying and manifesting love. That verse had been composed for me.

These thoughts surged in my mind. I was delighted; was filled with pride; was moved beyond measure. I started repeating that verse everyday as a prayerful entreaty to god. The verse I had composed dissolved into thin air. Only Pillaivál's verse got permanently lodged in my mind.

Muthukumáraswámi Pillai Thamizh:

Lord Murugá is widely respected as Tamil god. As Tamil learning became my primary passion, I thought it appropriate to direct my prayers to Lord Murugá. While I was praying everyday with *Manthra Japá* I developed a desire to pay obeisance to the Tamil god with Tamil verse; I resolved to chant one Tamil text everyday. Having learnt

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that Kumaragurupara Swámigal enjoyed the benediction of Lord Murugâ, I started chanting every morning Muthukumáraswámi Pillai Thamizh authored by him. This prayer continued even after I became Pillaivál's disciple.

Against this background I was overjoyed that I had also been blessed with the Vennpá composed for me by my teacher. I valued it as the manthra as a part of my morning chants.

As I used to chant the entire *Muthukumáraswámi Pillai Thamizh* during the mornings, it made some inroads into the time allocated for morning lessons. Pillaivál knew about my morning chants. When I came late for the morning class one day, he was waiting for my arrival, while the other students were already present. With a view to avoiding this contingency he told me one day, "It is indeed beneficial to chant the entire Muthukumáraswámi Pillai Thamizh; but it could be difficult to do it on a daily basis. It also causes delay in learning lessons during the bright hours of the morning. I would suggest a way out. Varugai Paruvam in this text is very important. It is enough if you chant the last two verses of this section. This is also widely practised." I found this suggestion useful and appropriate. As per his direction I started chanting only those two verses during the mornings.

Birth of Younger Brother:

He was born in the Ādi month of *Prajorepathy* year. I was then in my seventeenth year. My parents were in Sooryamoolai. With god's grace the younger brother was born on Monday, the 3rd of Ādi month (17.7.1871). My father himself came to Máyuram to give me the good news and to take me home. I had known how my separation was hurting my parents. I believed that the child was god's grace to rid my

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parents from the pangs of separation.

Pillaivál was happy on hearing the good news from my father. He turned towards me and told me, "A man with a younger brother fears not even battalion - this is a popular adage. I pray to Lord Shivá that the child should grow in good health and become a fine companion to you." After discussing about the progress in my studies father told Pillaivál, "I'll take him to my village and bring him back on completion of Punnyágaváchagam or purificatory rites." With Pillaivál's permission we left.

Sooryamoolai was about ten miles from Máyuram. We walked all the way. While going Appá enquired about how I was faring. From my reply he could discern my enthusiasm and happiness and noticeable improvement in my studies.

"Even on my way here I learnt about you. If I encountered anyone coming from Máyuram I inquired about Pillaivál. Their reply filled me with satisfaction. I asked one of them, 'Is Pillaivál keeping well? Is he in town? A Brahmin boy is learning under him. Do you know him?' 'Sure I do. Those who know Pillaivál can't help knowing his students. He used to tell the visitors about each of his students. I understand that he is particularly fond of his Brahmin student. He appears to be studying very well. Knows music too. Anyone knowing Pillaivál is aware of his great affection for the boy' said he. When I heard this I was very pleased. Your mother is all eagerness to see you," he said.

Ammá's Eagerness:

We reached Sooryamoolai. As soon as I reached home I made a dash to the delivery room shouting 'Ammá' My dear mother greeted me very fondly in a feeble voice.

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"Come on. See your little brother." My grandmother showed me the infant. I was thrilled to see the child. At the same time Ammá was bathed in joy inside the dark room.

"Sámá, you have grown so thin. Are you eating properly? Having regular oil-baths?" She made fond enquiries.

"Ammá, I am doing fine."

"I don't know. We have left you as an orphan. Only god should protect you in his grace." Her voice faltered. The sharpness of her anguish hit me too. My eyes betrayed my sorrow.

Bonds of Love:

Punniyágaváchagam was performed. I stayed there for a few more days. "The child is there all alone. Who is there to give him anything tasty and wholesome? Prepare some nice '*bhakshanam*' eats", Ammá pleaded. Those in the house lavished me everyday with all kinds of snacks. I told mother about Pillaivál's affection for me. On hearing this, she and others felt reassured.

My grandfather inquired about Pillaivál. He was delighted to hear about his Shiva bhakthi and teaching prowess. I recited a few verses composed by him and suffused with Shiva bhakthi. My grandfather was filled with pleasant surprise.

While at Sooryamoolai I savoured the joy of spending time with Ammá, Appá and the child. As I was kept away from my favourite and regular Tamil lessons I slowly started feeling that loss. Apart from being away from Tamil lessons, I also felt the anguish of separation from my benign teacher. This sadness kept raising its head amidst the pleasure of being with the family members. One realiza-

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tion struck me: 'God has established a subtle bond of affection between my teacher and myself. That bond holds sway over me. He prays for my welfare even when I am with my Ammá. I feel the sadness of being away from my mentor.' I prayed from the depth of my heart that this affection should remain undiminished.

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34. ERUDITION AND INDIGENCE

I took leave of my parents, maternal grand father and uncle and left Sooryamoolai and reached Máyuram. I realized that I had incurred a loss during the ten-day absence from Máyuram. During this period Pillaivál had started taking lessons on Periyapuránam.

Periyapuránam Lessons:

Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam had supervisory authority over the governing bodies of a few major temples in Thanjávoor district. Sri Mayuranáthar temple and Sri Ayyárappar temple in Máyuram belonged to this category. As representatives of the head of the *Ādheenam*, *Pandára Sannidigal*, the *Thambiráns* were managing the temples under Ādheenam's direction. These *Thambiráns* were called Kattalai Thambiráns, and their dwellings built for them and their attendants were called Kattalai Madams. The Kattalai Thambirán in Máyuram was one Bálasubramania Thambirán. He lived in the Kattalai Madam on the South Street of Máyuram, and was efficiently conducting the affairs of the temple. He was well trained in Tamil. As the Kattalai Madam was situated next to Pillaivál's house, he would often go there and spend time in pleasant conversations with the Thambirán. As he was interested in listening to Pillaivál's *Periya Puránam* lessons, he attended these lessons from the beginning. A few elderly persons also joined. Saverinátha Pillai was there too.

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When I returned from Sooryamoolai, the lessons had already covered up to '*Eripatha Náyanár Puránam*. This Puránam was commenced on the day of my return. Till then, I had not listened to Periya Puránam lessons. When a great Shivá devotee like Pillaivál taught Periya Puránam dealing with the greatness of the Saivite saints, Náyanmárs, it was no wonder that the nectar of Bhakti in this Puránam got greatly enhanced.

My study had covered only up to Prabandams. I had not reached the stage of learning *Kávyás*. Therefore, I had a doubt if Pillaivál would be inclined to teach this Puránam to me. Further, the other students were respectable people and more mature than me in Tamil learning and in years. I wondered if it would be at all appropriate to join them in the class.

At that point my beloved teacher called me and said, "You can also join them in listening to Periya Puránam lessons. It transported me to cloud nine; got immersed in a river of joy. I felt lost for a few minutes.

Do they bar children from big feasts? Don't everyone partake of the feast, with children by their side? As a child in Tamil learning I also got a place in that Periya Puránam feast.

As the history of *Náyanmárs* unfolded in the form of stories, and thanks to the free flowing style of Sekkizhár, I found Periya Puránam text very lucid. Further my teacher's teaching method helped me savour the epic all the more. During the lessons Pillaivál's intense Shiva bhakthi came to the fore.

His innate bhakthi appeared to be reflected in the Periya Puránam verses. During the lessons what I learnt was not mere Tamil. The seed of Shiva bhakthi planted in my heart

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by my maternal grand father and father started sprouting with the help of the nectarine Tamil of Pillaivál.

Verses from Books:

Periya Puránam lessons were ongoing. One day one Kannappa Thambirán came to Máyuram from Thiruvávaduthurai. He was the manager in the Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam Mutt. It so happened that on the day of his arrival *Kannappa Náyanár Puránam* was being taught. Kannappa Thambirán joined the class and delighted in the lecture. The lesson was being held in the Kattalai Madam.

As some students insisted on completing that Puránam that day itself the lesson was proceeding at a rapid pace. Our teacher also taught us with enthusiasm. We were taking part in the lessons with the help of printed books, then available. We reached a stage in the text highlighting Sivakosariár's disapproval of Kannappar's action. We continued. Pillaivál interjected at that stage: "Some more verses should be in this part. They have omitted some beautiful verses. These verses referred to Lord Shivá highlighting to Sivakosariár the greatness of Kannappa Náyanár's devotional intensity." He then directed me to bring from his box the palm manuscript of Periya Puránam. He opened the bundle. Sure enough the five verses were in the palm text as stated by him. He made us read those verses and explained the meaning. We admired the incredible memory of that treasure house of learning.

Food sans ghee:

The Kannappa Náyanár Puránam which commenced in the afternoon continued till midnight.

The Thambirán compelled our teacher to have the meal in the Kattalai Madam itself. He too agreed and had

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his meal there. In the meanwhile I went to the mess, had my food and returned.

After supper my teacher took leave of Thambiráns and returned to his house. I too accompanied him. He said, "I got ghee today because I happened to eat at the Mutt." Those words left me sad. He had been eating without ghee for a few days; didn't have the money to buy ghee. Unless someone helped on realizing the situation, he would generally not seek any assistance from others. As I was with him most of the time I knew that he was eating without any ghee. I realized how sad he must have been when he referred to luck visiting him that day in the form of ghee.

The travails of poverty were not new to me. I had felt it from my very early days. But, I did not expect it in Pillaivál. 'A great poet; highly respected by persons of distinction; receives showers of grace from the Tamil world; a savant respected by a major Ādheenam. He had to eat without ghee for days. One ghee-laced meal at the Kattalai Madam was a balm to his bruised heart.' None but those moving closely with him could have known this. Nor would he show it to others.

His was a chequered life. 'A grand feast; or even starvation.' This was the lot of this great poet. The more I learnt about it the more I was filled with surprise and sadness.

No Oil:

One day, preparing to have his oil bath he sat down on a wooden plank. A servant used to apply oil on him. He went inside and asked the cook for oil. There was no oil.

As my teacher had the practice of taking lessons in any situation, he started the lesson while waiting for oil. A few of us were seated by his side with book in hand. While he

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was waiting for oil, he forgot about it altogether in his enthusiasm to commence the lesson.

I observed it. I realized that there was no stock of oil in the house. As if going on some errand I stood up, scampered towards a shop on the Káveri bank, bought oil with the money I had, rushed back home, handed over the oil to the attendant and resumed my seat to listen to the lesson. After a while heated oil made its appearance. And the oil was smeared on him.

When I came to know of his predicament through such isolated incidents, my heart felt bruised. 'Co-existence of erudition and indigence appears to be the country's curse!' So ran my thoughts.

His Life:

As Pillaivál was mostly on the move he could not stay in one place with his family. He had left his wife and son Chidambaram Pillai in his own house at Thirusirapuram. He used to send money to them off and on for their expenses. While at Máyuram, he had two attendants with him. Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt remunerated them in the form of two 'kalams' of rice every month. Pillaivál was responsible for their food and other expenses.

Thavasi Pillai (Attendant):

One of the two Thavasi Pillais was Panchanatham. He tended to be uppity as he felt that he was an employee of the Mutt. He had no iota of feeling that it was his honour to serve such a great man. Love for Tamil was totally foreign to him. 'Collecting all the guys in town, toiling to no purpose and living as a spendthrift' - this was his assessment of Pillaivál. He had a special dislike for the students flocking there. Pillaivál never bothered about anyone not being

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respectful to him. On the other hand Panchanatham Pillai expected the students to respect him. When he got angry, it was difficult to escape its impact. I had not known about his qualities.

A few days after I joined Pillaivál, I called him out as 'Panchanatham'. He walked away with disdain. My teacher had noted this. When he was not around my teacher told me, "Hereafter don't call him Panchanatham. Call him 'Panchanatham Pillai'. Don't refer to him by 'Nee' in familiar singular. Call him as 'Neer' or better still as 'Neengal' in respectful form of address. He is a boor. I am spending my time all the while making sure that I don't ruffle his feathers." Human nature can indeed be strange, I realized. Thereafter I dealt with him gingerly.

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35. SUBRAMANIA DESIKAR'S PRESENCE

The Thámirabarani river and the holy site of Thirukutrálam are great treasures for the people of Thirunelveli district. Likewise the compositions of Melagaram Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar are honoured as literary wealth. Melagaram lies between Tenkási and Thirukutrálam. In the olden days most of the dignitories from the Thirunelveli parts used to enjoy reciting verses from *Thirukutrála Kuravanji*, when they travel to other parts; many also recited rare verses from *Thirukutrála Sthala Puráná*. Pillaivál had not read the works of Thirukooda Rásappa Kaviráyar, held in such esteem by the people of South Pándyá land. He wanted to get those works and study them.

Thirukutrála Yamaga Andháthi:

Sri Subramania Desikar was the titular head of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam. He came in the lineage of Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar. Pillaivál got *Thirukutrála Sthala Puráná* and *Thirukutrála Yamaga Andháthi* from Desikar's younger brother and started studying it on his own. He figured out the meaning of Yamaga Andháthi and taught us. He made us read Kutrála Sthala Puráná and savoured it. He heaped praise on the finesse of its style and the depth of its meaning.

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I could commit to memory a few verses from Thirukutrála Yamaga Andháthi. While teaching the text Pillaivál told me: "The Kaviráyar who authored this holy text was a fine poet. As the Mahá Sannidánam honouring the Thiruvávaduthuruai holy site belongs to that Kaviráyar's lineage, he has considerable erudition in Tamil. He is also very knowledgeable in Sanskrit and music. You will soon get to have his darshan."

Kuttis!

It was time in Thiruvávaduthurai for the Guru Poojá of Sri Ambalavána Desikar, the 15th Mahá Sannidánam. The present Ādheenam had sent a benedictory communication to Pillaivál to attend the Guru Poojá. He spent three days in Thiruvávaduthurai for the celebration and returned to Máyuram. He was narrating to a friend what all happened there. A few of us students were listening to it.

"Mahá Sannidánam extended an affectionate welcome to us. He ordered me to come to Thiruvávaduthurai and teach those in the Mutt. The Kuttis there too focussed around me and insisted that I should somehow move to the Mutt and take lessons for them. I had agreed to the request."

When I was listening to Pillaivál I was startled on hearing the reference to Kuttis (meaning 'Young girls'). 'Kuttis in a religious Order?' I was amazed. I had only known Kuttis to mean young girls. Saverinátha Pillai was by my side and I asked him, "What is the reason for Kuttis being present in a Mutt?" He broke into a smile and explained: "Junior Thambiráns are referred to in the Mutt as 'Kutti Thambiráns' or Junior Thambiráns. As a shortened form it is

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* *The Heads of these religious Orders are usually called 'Mahá Sannidánam' or 'Sannidánam'.*

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also the practice to refer to them as Kuttis. My doubt was mercifully resolved.

"If we go and stay in Thiruvávaduthurai we can have lessons with no interruption. Vidwáns would visit frequently; we can get to know them. Often we will have the fortune of listening to Sannidánam too. Can you think of a greater benefit? More than anything else there would be good food facilities for these boys." Pillaivál expressed his position. It was obvious that the students' welfare was uppermost in his mind.

This function took place in Áni month. 'The Sannidánam who commands so much of Pillaivál's respect and praise must truly be a connoisseur', I thought. Having heard a lot about the glory of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam and about the eminence of its head Sri Subramania Desikar, I started looking forward to moving to Thiruvávaduthurai.

Ârumugatthá Pillai:

One day a wealthy Saiva Vellálá gentleman by name Ârumugatthá Pillai had come from Patteeswaram. He held Pillaivál in high esteem. Pillaivál used to visit Patteeswaram often and spend a few days with him.

Fully aware of Pillaivál's eminence and influence Ârumugatthá Pillai had come to take Pillaivál to Patteeswaram to resolve some problems in his family. My teacher bestowed special love on Ârumugathá Pillai. So he decided to visit Patteeswaram.

Visit to Thiruvávaduthurai:

"Let us go to Thiruvávaduthurai, take leave of Sannidánam and proceed to Patteeswaram", said my teacher. Along with Ârumugathá Pillai, myself and the attendant Panchanatham Pillai, Pillaivál left for Thiruvávaduthurai.

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Thiruvávaduthurai was about ten miles from Máyuram. Ârumugathá Pillai had brought a carriage. All of us boarded the car. Also walked for a while en route. During the journey Pillaivál shared a lot of information about Thiruvávaduthurai.

"Sannidánam may ask you a few questions; may direct you to recite a few verses; you may recite in a suitable rágá; Sannidánam is very much interested in music. If he asks you to, explain the meaning boldly. Should Sannidánam develop a liking for you, you can derive a lot of benefits."

People we met on the way reverentially gave way to Pillaivál. We neared the outskirts of Thiruvávaduthurai. Everyone we met there welcomed Pillaivál enthusiastically. They surrounded him and enquired about his welfare. Some of the Odhuvárs (devotional singers) belonging to the Mutt immediately informed Subramania Desikar about Pillaivál's arrival. Desikar sent for him.

Subramania Desikar's Presence:

We entered the Mutt precincts. Inside the Mutt and north of the 'Odukkam' Sri Subramania Desikar was seated facing south. The portion of the mutt where the Pandára Sannidhis stayed was called Odukkam. Subramania Desikar's appearance had a pleasing aspect to it. I had never encountered such a presence before. He was bathed in the purity and spirituality of an evolved soul. His face gleamed with a tranquil poise devoid of any trace of unease. His saffron garb, Rudhráksha necklace and the Japa garland around his head highlighted his Saivite eminence.

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The 'Árukatti'* he wore in his ears, Sundara Vedham, the 'angushtam' ring and the gleam of health bore witness that he was indeed the monarch among sanyásis. His presence combined the merit of renunciation and wealth. In his majestic presence, in his bright face, in his benign look, in his very posture, in his voice, in his magnetic aura _ one could discern a natural leader and a connoisseur.

Many persons were sititng around him. The lucidity of wisdom was writ large on their faces. Their faces were directed towards Subramania Desikar. As soon as Pillaivál entered, Desikar welcomed him with a warm look. Everyone around looked at my teacher. A thrill went through them.

Obeisance:

Pillaivál prostrated at Deiskar's feet. His body contour did not quite facilitate paying such a form of respect. He had to do it with visible effort. This sight surprised me. As a great savant his erudition was phenomenal. As one who never bowed down to anyone, here was he paying effusive repsect. I was struck by his modesty and by his devotion to the Guru.

My teacher got up and went towards Desikar to collect holy ash. I stood behind him. Pillaivál respectfully bowed before Desikar. Desikar himself fondly smeared the holy ash on Pillaivál's forehead and asked him to sit down.

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* *Árukatti : It is a piece of jewellery connoting conquest over six(Áru) negative traits, i.e., lust, anger, miserliness, accusitiveness, arrogance and malice.*

Sundara Vedham is a circular gold ear-ring. As the great Saivite saint Sundaramoorthy Náyanár had owned this ear-ring this name had come into vogue. It was the practice for Saivite saints to wear this piece of jewellery.

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As was the custom Pillaivál tried to prostrate once more; Desikar stopped him saying , " Once is good enough. No need to continue this practice." My teacher settled down. Desikar pointed towards me and asked, " Is he the Sáminátha Iyer taking lessons from you?". Pillaivál said: "Swámi". And, Desikar asked me also to sit down. It was a practice those days to use the term 'Swami' to say 'Yes'. I was sitting behind my teacher. 'Oh, my teacher seems to have already mentioned about me. And the Sannidánam is gracious enough to remember it'. I felt elated.

Void without You:

Desikar initially enquired about Pillaivál's welfare. When he told him "Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer had come here. Last evening he delivered a discourse on Somásimára Náyanár. Sanskrit vidwáns from Thiruvidaimarudur and Thiruválankádu as also some distinguished persons from other parts had also come; an enlightened assembly; your absence was keenly felt. Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer drew many interesting parallels from Sanskrit texts. He also quoted from *Periya Puránam* and *Thiruvásakam*, and also from your compositions of *Soodha Sangithai*. He started with the remark, 'Pillaivál has said like this', and recited your verses musically and explained their significance. This highlighted your esteem. He recited frequently to your works. Since then we have been thinking about you. The Thambiráns here and others have been eagerly looking forward to your arrival". His words were soaked in affection and sweetness. 'The world is large; there are innumerable great persons in this world. Rare and appealing qualities also abound,' I tended to think each minute.

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Expansive Greatness:

I had already heard about Pillaivál's greatness. After becoming his student I personally felt its vibrations; I thought I had realized the full extent of his esteem. Now I realized that I was wrong. I found in Thiruvávaduthurai that the prince amongst the sanyásis, Subramania Desikar himself stated in the company of great vidwáns that he was missing the august presence of my teacher. The information that Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer had cited my teacher's works along with Periya Puránam and Thiruvásakam, and the affection lavished on him by Desikar made it clear to me that I was yet to realize in full the expanse of Pillaivál's greatness.

My eyes were riveted on Desikar's majestic presence as he lavished praise on my teacher in that distinguished assembly. I was filled with amazement on my teacher's distinction attracting praise from so many quarters. I felt blessed at the good fortune of my association with him.

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36. ALL SO NEW!

When I was lost in the majesty of Subramania Desikar's persona he looked at me affectionately and called me near him. I gingerly inched forward. I remembered my teacher telling me in Máyuram that Sannidánam might well put me to some test. At the same time I had a reasonable level of confidence that I could handle his question appropriately. I was also eager to leave a favourable impression on him. I felt that good days were ahead.

Test and Triumph:

But, it was a strange place; an assembly full of illustrious vidwáns; a benign presence invoking awe even in my teacher. I had a genuine reserve in opening my mouth in such an overwhelming environment. Eagerness and trepidation locked horns.

"Recite a verse known to you," Desikar directed.

I was already expecting this.

'I should recite difficult verses involving texts such as *Yamaga Andháthi* and *Thiribu Andháthi*. Only then he would realize that I am a sincere and hardworking student'. This was my plan. I shaped to recite a verse from Thiruvávaduthurai Yamaga Andháthi authored by Pillaivál. Before that I looked in my teacher's direction. He gave a visual green signal.

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My voice froze; body trembled; I was bathed in sweat. But I was not down and out. I recited a verse starting '*Arasar* Vanatthai' from *Thiruvávaduthurai Yamaga Andháthi*. As it was in *Kattalai Kalithurai* format I recited the verse in Bhairavi rágá.

"Can you explain the meaning?"

"He will" my teacher interjected. It was not meant to be a reply to Desikar's question. It was a signal that he wanted me to explain the meaning. I got the hint.

While explaining the meaning I somewhat faultered. "Don't be scared. Explain the meaning confidently." My teacher egged me on. I slowly shed my fear and started explaining the meaning with a natural assurance. I also recited a few more verses from *Thuraisai Andháthi*.

"If you know more verses, go ahead and recite them," Desikar directed.

By then I had mustered enough courage. No more trepidation. I recited the verse '*Ambalavá Ambalavá*' from Pillaivál's *Thirutthillai Yamaga Andháthi*. By now my enunciation was better and clearer. I also highlighted the nuances of Bhairavi rágá.

An approving smile graced Desikar's face. The gentle nod of his head made me happy. I explained the meaning of that verse too. When I was wondering which verse to take up next, I remembered my teacher telling me that Subramania Desikar belonged to the lineage of Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar. It was a signal for me to recite a verse from *Thirukutrála Yamaga Andháthi*. '*Puvi thantha váranan*' was that verse.

Desikar listened to it attentively. After all, a part of his patrimony. I repeated the lines in the verse twice or thrice and explained the meaning.

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"Recite something more from that text," said Desikar. 'My plan is clicking,' I felt exhilarated. I recited a few more verses I knew.

"Is this not Thirukutrála Yamaga Andháthi? This is not very popular in these parts. How did you access this?" Subramania Desikar asked.

Pillaivál answered: "This humble self had for long desired to study this text as also *Thirukutrála Puránam*. Shanbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar got them for me. I first read the Andháthi, determined its meaning and taught this student. I am also presently studying Kutrála Puránam,"

"Oh! Really?" said Desikar and looked in my direction suggesting that I could proceed further. I recited a few verses from *Thirupugalur Andháthi*. I could sense satisfaction and support from his facial aspect. I got increasingly confident and recited the verses and their meaning.

"He recites verses well. Has a good voice; and good musical knowledge. I believe he would come up well. As your student, should there be any doubt that he would prosper?" Desikar said.

"When he came before the august presence of Sannidánam, this humble self was sure that he was already on the upward path. As grace has blossomed in Sannidánam's heart can he have any shortfall?" Pillaivál said.

Desikar's words filled my heart with hope and happiness. 'We have won in the test'. This feeling was at the root of my happiness.

Thereafter Pillaivál and Sannidánam discussed various other matters. At one point Desikar said, "I think it is time. You complete your poojá and come for Sabhápathi darshan." Pillaivál took leave and set out towards the room

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in the southern part of the tank, for his bath. I followed him. Sabhápathi Poojá is a special poojá conducted everyday at the Mutt by the Mahá Sannidhánam himself.

Unfolding Scenes:

As I was walking my eyes kept wandering. The surrounding scenes kept attracting my attention. The place was full of purity, austerity and Shivá devotion. There was a lovely pond in front of the southern entrance of the Mutt. There was a building on the shore of the pond. It was called 'Kulappurai'. 'Purai' means 'house'. This is a Malayalam terminology.

We went to Kulappurai. Warm water was ready for Pillaivál. When we were proceeding towards the tank, a group of senior Thambiráns, Kutti Thambiráns, officials of the Mutt and Odhuvárs surrounded him and made fond enquiries. Many asked him expectantly, "So you will be with us hereafter?" Before Pillaivál could answer some Thambiráns said, "We are all eagerly waiting to learn lessons from Ayyá; it is our good fortune that Ayyá has come here." There was evident joy in their words.

I was amazed at the appearance of Thambiráns. 'How have they managed to grow such long matted lock of hair?' I was filled with surprise. The beauty of their ochre robes, the way they wore their clothes over their head, their big ear-rings, Rudhráksha beads and their glistening bodies smeared with holy ash - all these made an impressive spectacle. Their robes and the Saivite symbols excelled the normal run of grand garments and jewellery.

Pillaivál completed his bath and set out for his poojá. There was a place north of Kulappurai, earmarked for performing poojá. It was called poojá madam. There was a

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poojá madam west of the pond. A few senior Thambiráns were performing poojás meticulously and silently. Attendants in wet clothes were standing near them and offering assistance for their poojá. They gave the Thambiráns flowers such as Malligai and Mullai and sacred leaves like vilvam kept in silver sálwars.

The Thambiráns were leaving after their poojá. A few others were coming for their poojá after bath. The floral remains of the offerings were heaped in a tub so that they wouldn't be trampled upon.

I had observed my grand father and father performing Shiva poojá. So any Shiva poojá used to instil in me a feeling of devotion and tranquility. Their poojás were not accompanined by such paraphernalia. This place, however, thronged with people performing poojá. There was an unending flow of offerings related to poojá. The place was full of Shiva poojá scenes.

This holy Saivite seat was celebrated as Shivá's Kingdom. The Head of the Order was a veritable king of monks. The Thambiráns under him were soldiers of Gnána in Saivite garb. Their main job was to perform Shiva poojá, to offer service to their Guru and studying noble texts. Fully conscious of their duties, these Thambiráns were performing poojás and other duties enthusiastically in that Saivite domain. These were their daily obligations. This new organization surprised me with its novelty; and filled me with a quiet pleasure. Only then I realized the significance of my teacher and others referring to Thiruvávaduthurai and praising it at every turn.

I stood there in awe looking at the things around. A person came up to me and asked, "Why do you keep standing here?". "These scenes overwhelm me with their novelty. I barely feel like going anywhere else," I said.

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"You call this novel and wonderful? You seem to be a newcomer here. Go and have a look at the place up there on the west - Abhisheka Kattalai Mandapam, a place for special oblutions. If you look at the northern madam you will be astonished. You can see similar scenes in the Kulappurai too. And then, Maraignána Desikar Temple, Káveri bathing ghat and the flower gardens - you will be swept off your feet when you see these places." He went on and on with a certain casualness. 'Oh! It looks as if I have migrated from the earth and entered the celestial abode of Shivá!' His words filled me with delight.

'No, no. we are very much in terra firma. I should also have my bath and have my meal' - My growing hunger flagged this message. 'After all I am going to have an opportunity to stay here. Am I then going to miss these points of interest?' With this consolation I set out to have my bath. Pillaivál had completed his bath and related ablutions and gone to have Sabhápathi darshan.

Feast and Blessing:

I completed my bath and other ritual observances. A Brahmin official took me to the place earmarked for my meals. It was a choultry providing food for Brahmins. It was a spacious building on the southern banks of the holy tank in front of the Shivá temple. I found many persons there engaged in lively conversation. It was no empty gossip. Some were reciting Sanskrit slokás and explaining the meaning. Some were singing keerthanás. A few others recited Tamil verses. I could guess that among them were a few Sanskrit vidwáns, musicians and Tamil scholars. They were also praising Subramania Desikar off and on.

When I reached the choultry one of them called me and said, "Haven't you come with Pillaivál? You recited

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some verses with music in the presence of Sannidánam; we all savoured it." Some others also moved towards me and said, "When you sang, the Bhairavi rágá was perfect and flawless. Sannidánam also noted and enjoyed it," said one of them. I guessed that he must be a music vidwán. Another person asked, "Who taught you music?" "My father" I replied. "No wonder. This is traditional gnána. Your singing was superb," he said loudly, slapping his thighs.

"How long have you been studying under Pillaivál?" another person asked. "Only four five months".

"You are indeed lucky. It appears that Pillaivál has a lot of affection for you. Further, Sannidánam too is satisfied with you. I am sure you have made it," said another. "This great poet is an eminent benefactor in dispensing knowledge. This great saint is unparalleled in providing sustenance and resources. What more do you need when you have already won the affection of these two great souls?" Another person commented. Everyone spoke with enthusiasm and goodwill. I kept listening, bowing down my head in modesty.

I enjoyed a good meal. Then the scholars there asked me to recite a few verses. So I did. They felt happy and blessed me.

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37. THE PRIZE I RECEIVED

I had not been used to the company of a gathering of vidwáns. The Thiruvávaduthurai experience was new. The scholarly discussions among vidwáns and their citing slokás filled me with happiness. When music vidwáns praised me I started wondering whether my stopping musical training was a mistake. But that thought did not persist.

At that point a person came from the Mutt and took me there. Subramania Desikar was seated majestically in the upstairs State room. Pillaivál and a few Thambiráns were seated near him. As soon as I went there Subramania Desikar fondly enquired if I had my meal and asked me to be seated. I sat behind Pillaivál.

The Thambiráns there were holding books in their hands. On observing it I thought Pillaivál had already started the lesson and regretted my delayed arrival.

Resolution of Doubts:

Subramania Desikar had already taught the Thambiráns the *Tamil Ezhutthilakkanam*, the part of grammar that deals with sounds, letters and their combinations. The Thambiráns had not clearly understood some of the verses cited as examples in the grammár text. While encountering such situations, I learnt that Desikar used to say, "You can get this matter clarified when Pillaivál comes here. Keep a

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note of these points." As per Desikar's directive the Thambiráns were raising those doubts with Pillaivál. The savant clarified every doubt fluently and lucidly. The Thambiráns were eagerly raising questions. While Pillaivál explained the meaning, Subramania Desikar was even more attentive than the Thambiráns. Sometimes Desikar would remind the Thambiráns about some doubts not raised by them.

While I was observing this I was able to learn many new things - not only the aspects clarified by my teachers, but also the conventions and procedures of the Ādheenam. The doubts raised by the Thambiráns were also the doubts entertained by Subramania Desikar; but, as the spiritual head of the Mutt he did not directly raise the doubts with Pillaivál like a student. He made the Thambiráns flag the doubts; and in the process he also got his own doubts clarified. I would also observe Desikar's keenness in learning. Otherwise he could as well have sent the Thambiráns to Pillaivál to get their doubts resolved. He did not do that. He was himself present during the proceedings. In spiritual matters he was the mentor and Pillaivál his disciple; there was no doubt on this point. But Desikar was prepared to forget his spiritual eminence and supremacy as the head of the Mutt, and was attentive during my teacher's lessons. The way my teacher paid obeisance to Desikar that morning reminded me of the supremacy of spirituality. The great scholar clarifying doubts in the afternoon in the immediate presence of Desikar pointed to his exalted erudition.

The Thambiráns were raising the doubts one by one - some doubts were very difficult. When Pillaivál clarified those doubts Subramania Desikar was all attention. On getting clarified, he would exclaim, "So good! So apt!" When he got very pleased he lauded, "Remarkable!" Pillaivál kept resolving those doubts with great facility; with modesty;

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with no trace of arrogance.

Ashtanágabandham:

After getting doubts from some texts clarified, the Thambiráns started raising doubts from the grammar text *Thandi Alankáram*. They requested Pillaivál to show how to accommodate the *Nágabandham* verses in the text into a figure of serpents. *Ashta Nágabandham* is one of the pictorial verse forms. The verse should be accommodated in a diagram of eight intertwining serpents. Pillaivál asked for a paper and pencil and started drawing.

My Haste:

As he started, I drew the diagram on a paper and accommodated those verses in the diagram. Soon I realized that my hasty intervention was a mistake. While so, is it not a natural human desire to display one's prowess on some occasions? Impelled by such a desire I had constructed the Nágabandam.

After I completed the diagram my teacher looked at it and asked me, "It is really good. Where did you learn this?" "I learnt it from Chenganam Viruddáchala Reddiár. I can also draw pictorial verses such as *Rathabandham*," I replied.

We Will Get Everything:

The Thambiráns looked at the Ashta Nágabandham I had drawn; so did Subramania Desikar. "He is a sharp boy. Appears to have learnt a lot of things," complimented Desikar. He turned towards me and told me with a benign smile: "Study well under Pillaivál. You are still young. You can learn a lot from him. When he comes here do come along with him. We will provide you all facilities. We will also celebrate your marriage." I gently smiled.

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"Why are you smiling? Marriage should be pleasurable," said he.

At that point Pillaivál interjected, "He is already married."

"I see, that's why he smiles! So what? Are there not other things to be accomplished? We will make all necessary arrangements.... We will also buy you the books required for your studies." Sannidánam said graciously.

Gift of Books:

At once Desikar stood up and got a cupboard opened. It was full of books. He picked up many books. "Have you studied *Kambar Andháthi*? Here it is, study it well. You can study under him. *Amudámbigai Pillai Thamizh* and *Senkazhuneer Vináyaka Pillai Thamizh*. Sivagnána Swámigal's texts are wonderful," Desikar said.

He gave four copies of a few Prabandhams and told me, "You can take one each - You can give the other copies to your fellow students". I turned the pages of each book with great enthusiasm. Even a gift of golden treasure wouldn't have given me comparable happiness.

"Read all these Prabandhams. Thereafter they will give you bigger texts," Subramania Desikar told me affectionately. Then he asked me to recite musically some of the verses I knew. I had sung the verses that morning in Bhairavi rágá. Now I recited a few verses in other rágás. Desikar enjoyed it and told my teacher, "You must get him trained in music too."

My teacher was very happy at the affection bestowed on me by Subramania Desikar. The expression on his face highlighted it.

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"Should Come Here":

Thereafter Desikar started speaking to Pillaivál. "Thanks to your visit here we have spent the entire morning in exchanges related to Tamil. We are greatly satisfied. The Thambiráns were also very delighted. They are all eager to study Tamil texts. A few others are also similarly interested. We are teaching them to the extent possible. The Ādheenam matters command our attention. Many dignitories and scholars visit here frequently. Discussing things with them and sending them away satisfied takes a toll on our time. So we are not able to slake the Thambiráns' thirst for knowledge. If only you could come and stay here and take lessons, everyone would be happy. We would also savour the pleasure of conversations with you. Further, many visitors raise the question, Where is Pillaivál? We hesitate to tell them that you are in Máyuram. You are an adornment to this Ādheenam, and it is our duty to make you teach Tamil here; so we find it not quite proper to tell others that you are living in Máyuram. Those visitors who go to Máyuram manage to call on you. But the others go away sad at not being able to see you. So, hereafter you have to move here with your disciples".

"It is the duty of this humble self to act as per the desire of Sannidánam," Pillaivál replied with humility.

Árumugathá Pillai's Misgiving:

At this point Árumugathá Pillai who was observing all this suddnely stood up, paid obeisance to Sannidánam, placed his palm in front of his mouth respectfully and said: "Sannidánam should be gracious enough to direct that I could take Ayyá Avargal to Patteeswaram for a few days. I have a few important things to be accomplished with his help. Only for this purpose this humble self had gone to

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Máyuram and fetched him." On hearing what Subramania Desikar had told Pillaivál, he was afraid that Pillaivál might stay back here and his plans would be ruined.

Subramania Desikar understood his point. With a gentle smile he said, "You may do so. No obstacle to it. After all, does not Pillai belong to all of us?". Only then Ârumugathá Pillai could heave a sigh of relief.

Taking Leave:

"Ok, you may go to Patteeswaram, spend some time there and then return." With this permission from Sannidánam my teacher stood up, paid respect to Desikar, collected a prasádam of holy ash and came out of the Mutt.

The Thambiráns and a few others came along with him. Some of them told Ârumugathá Pillai, "Please don't take advantage of Sannidánam's permission and detain Ayyá Avargal for a long time in Patteeswaram". All of them walked some distance with us. Some of them asked me, "Which is your native place? What are the texts you have studied?". I replied them suitably. They asked me some doubts in the texts I had studied. 'The affection bestowed on me by Subramania Desikar and Pillaivál that morning had evoked in them a respect for me. Otherwise, would these Thambiráns be raising doubts with a mere young boy like me? How little I have studied? And, how much respect am I receiving! Is not this honour a dole granted by my great guru?' I thought. 'It is just a few months since I came under my master. I have barely touched the rim of the ocean of knowledge. If only I could garner more knowledge by studying under him, how much more benefit can I derive!' I thought. I resolved never to part from him, whatever the difficulties.

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Panchanatham Pillai's Action:

Those who came along with us walked some distance and then took leave of Pillaivál. Pillaivál and Ârumugatthá Pillai got into the carriage arranged by the latter. When I was about to climb into the carriage Panchanatham Pillai rushed towards me and snatched away the new books in my possession. When I remonstrated that I needed them, he said, "Why do you require so many copies? Is it not enough if you keep one copy each?" He gave me one copy of each book and took away the rest. Were they not the first gifts I had received from Subramania Desikar? When Panchanatham Pillai snatched them away from me I had the fury to give two solid slaps on his cheek. But I had not forgotten Pillaivál's warning that I should be guarded in dealing with him. So I swallowed my anger and got into the carriage.

I had been overwhelmed by the respect for Tamil and the civility of behaviour of everyone from the Head of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam to the Thambiráns and other officials. Against this background I was appalled by Panchanatham Pillai's behaviour _ total lack of politeness, ignorance of the greatness of Tamil and his boorishness. 'Even after spending thousand years with noble people, some persons cannot give up their uncivilized nature', I consoled myself. The carriage with two bullocks started speeding on the road.

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38. THE BOON I GRANTED

We left Thiruvávadthurai and reached Thiruvidaimarudur by six in the evening. We stayed there in the house of Subbaiáh Pandáram, Ârumugatthá Pillai's brother-in-law. My teacher thought that we would stay there overnight and proceed to Patteeswaram the next morning.

Shivakkozhundu Desikar's Greatness:

Pillaivál had a weak constitution; so, on reaching that house, he lay on a couch, recited a few verses, made me write them down and also explained their meaning. He told me that Thiruvidaimarudur was a reputed holy site and that it has been celebrated in a puránam authored by a vidwán by name Kottiyoor Sivakkozhundu Desikar. He also made laudatory reference to Sivakkozhundu Desikar's literary creations.

A feast was served in Subbaiáh Pandáram's house for Ârumugatthá Pillai and my teacher. My teacher turned to Subbaiáh Pandáram and told him, "Please make some arrangement for Sáminátha Iyer's meal." Pandáram said that tasty prasádhams would be available in Mahálinga Swámi Temple and took me there. Thiruvidaimarudur was under the jurisdiction of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam. A Thambirán normally takes care of the temple administration.

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There was also a Kattalai Thambirán of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam at Thiruvidaimarudur. As Thiruvidaimarudur was only six miles from Thiruvávaduthurai, the Head of the Mutt used to visit Thiruvidamarudur, whenever he got an opportunity and stayed in the Kattalai Madam.

Kattalai Thambirán:

Earlier one Subramania Thambirán was the administrative head of Thiruvidaimarudur Kattalai. He was managing the temple affairs very well and also introduced some reforms. As many temples functioned under the jurisdiction of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam, it was the practice to transfer a Thambirán in charge of a temple to another temple or as an official in a main mutt and replace him with another Thambirán. Accordingly Subramania Thambirán was transferred from Thiruvidaimarudur temple as the administrative head of Áludaiyár temple. After he left another Thambirán was looking after the affairs of Thiruvidaimarudur for some time. Some Thambiráns staying in the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt perfroming poojá and studying there would develop a desire to hold some office under the Mutt. Noting this inclination, the Head of the Mutt used to nominate some Thambiráns for administrative duties off and on. When we were in Thiruvidaimarudur, the Thambirán there was one such appointee.

Subbaiáh Pandáram took me to the temple. In the main thinnai near the front entrance of the temple the Kattalai Thambirán was seen reclining on a bolster. Some officials were standing by his side. Some others were reverentially waiting with account books.

The strong coat of holy ash, Rudhráksha beads, ochre robes and imposing looks lent an air of respectability to him. Some Thambiráns tended to give an appearance of ad-

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ministrative competence. This Thambirán was one such. He constantly looked with satisfaction at his broad chest and indulged in ostentatious display of his authority.

Subbaiáh Pandáram took me to the Thambirán and paid him respect. The Thambirán asked him in an overbearing tone, "What brings you here? Who is this?" Pandáram replied: "Pillaivál has come. He is staying in my house. This person is studying under him. He has sent me to 'Sámi' with a request that he may be given some prasádam from the kitchen."

Thambirán gave us a glance. "Pillaivál has come, has he? Can't he come to this Kattalai Madam?"

"He feels exhausted. He can lie down and relax, if he is in my house. Someone can also massage his feet. If he comes to Kattalai Madam, would it be proper for him to lie down in front of Sámi and also ask someone to massage his hands and feet? That's why he has stayed back in my house." Subbaiáh Pandáram offered an explanation.

"Ok, ok. Only those used to Madam's way would know how to be respectful. Don't I know what kind of respect he has for me?" Thambirán said.

Then he looked at the person in charge of the kitchen, who happened to be standing there. That Brahmin respectfully came forward and said, "Sámi" duly holding his palm in front of his mouth. "What?" the Thambirán asked. 'He has come. We should give him prasádam with due courtesy'. This meaning was implied in the tone of his question. "Sámi," that official repeated. 'I will of course take good care of him'. That was meant by the monosyllabic 'Sámi'. Then the Thambirán issued clear instructions. Indicating that he would abide by the instructions the Brahmin official said "Sámi" again and took me inside.

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I went there ahead of the final night poojá. I went inside the temple and paid obeisance to the Lord. The official rushed me. I made my prayer very brief and went to the kitchen.

Hunger Pangs:

It was already ten; what with the fatigue of the travel I was well and truly famished. As the temple prasádams generally have a reputation for purity and taste, my mouth started watering. As the official was taking me with great politeness I was looking forward to a tasty fare.

The place inside the kitchen was pitch dark. As I staggered inside the official asked me to sit in one corner and brought a tiny hand lamp. As directed by him another person brought a variety of *prasádams* in a large plate and placed it in front of me.

I was overwhelmed on seeing the size of the plate. "Why so much?" I asked. "You can take a little bit of each of the dishes".

"What are all the prasádams on this plate?" I asked.

"You have sugar pongal; tamarind rice; there is rice mixed with pepper powder and cumin; there is rice mixed with sesame powder; and there is black gram rice. Apart from this we also have '*páyasam*', *Thenkuzhal*, *Adhirasam*, *Vadai* and sweet pastry ball." He went on and on. I had a natural flair for such prasádams; combined with my ravenous hunger, I had a desparate urge to have a go at the meal.

Sacred Prasádam:

The normal method of eating that comes in contact with one's spittle is considered contaminating; it is deemed particularly improper in the temple precincts. So I request-

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ed him to place the prasádam bit by bit in my hand so that I could avoid such impropriety. He placed a helping of tamarind rice on my hand. It had a tiny trace of tamarind; salt was absent; spice and oil were scarce. "What is this?" I asked him. "You mean this? Of course, this is tamarind rice," he replied.

The fare I tossed inside my mouth had a liberal sprinkling of pebbles and husk. There was no way I could spit it out. Spitting in temple kitchen? Was it not blasphemy? If I had at all to spit I would have had to negotiate different parts of the temple, go out in the open and spit.

I munched and swallowed the prasádam he had named as tamarind rice. The next turn came to sweet pongal. It had a burnt smell and an apologetic trace of jaggery. It appeared as if it would come out of my mouth before it even made an entry. Then came the white pongal. It took me nearly half an hour to deal with the pebbles and husk safely lodged in it and flush it down my throat. My hunger quickly disappeared. Those eye-catching prasádhams were fit only to be offered to god who mercifully had no obligation to partake of it. The snacks such as *Thenkuzhal, Adhirasam and Vadai* somehow managed not to betray their names. Compared to the other items they were simply divine. I took a few pieces of those snacks, washed my hands and staged a relieved exit.

"Grant Me a Boon":

As I was staggering my way out in the dark my leg stumbled upon some chilly object. I was shocked that it could be a snake or some other animal. I shook my leg. "Please bring some light here," I shouted. A person brought a tiny lamp. I looked down; surprise gripped me.

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The official who had brought me to the kitchen was at my feet, firmly holding on to my feet. His wet hands unexpectedly touching my feet was the cause of my shock.

That person was over sixty. I could not understand why he was prostrating at my feet. I wondered if that was also part of the temple courtesy.

"Why are you doing this?" I asked him in trepidation.

"I am seeking a boon of you. You must grant me the boon; otherwise I will lose my head. I wouldn't let go your feet. I will let go only if you promise me to grant this boon."

The whole thing appeared strange to me; was very confusing. 'Has he made a god of me today? It is true that the prasádams he had offered me were fit only to be offered to gods! And now he is prostrating at my feet; and seeks a boon. All these appear to be a big drama.' I thought. "Please get up. What do you mean by a boon? And my granting the boon?" I asked him. But he wouldn't let go.

"Unless you give me the promise I wouldn't relent."

"Ok. I'll do as you want." I told him.

He slowly got up. Holding his palm in front of his mouth he gave a tearful entreaty.

"I do realize that you didn't like the prasádams today. The regular cook hasn't turned up today. So nothing could be prepared properly. If the Sámi (Kattalai Thambirán) comes to know of this my head will roll. I beg of you not to inform Sámi about this. If you do, my entire family will be ruined. I have a large family. I am eking out a living in the name of Lord Mahálingam. Pray don't destroy my family." The man who favoured me with pebbles and husk in the prasádams was now all humility and all prayer.

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"Sure. You need have no worry." I graciously granted his boon.

'Nowhere Like this:

I carefully came out of the kitchen and happened to see the Thambirán.

"What happened? It has taken so long. Has the fellow unnecessarily delayed you?" He asked.

"No. there was a great variety of prasádams. It took long to taste each one of them."

Only I knew it would have taken the whole night to munch and swallow the entire supply of pebbles and husk!

"How was the fare?'

"Never seen the like of it anywhere else".

"That's what everyone says. Things were in disarray earlier. After our arrival we had to set things right. Everything will be fine under the right management. Is management all that simple a matter?"

Thambirán was in a self-congratulatory mood. I was apprehensive of what to do if he continued to expatiate on his administrative prowess. Further I had tucked in my mouth pebbles I could not grind and swallow, and I had to rush outside the temple to unload those pebbles.

"My teacher would be waiting for me, and I should be leaving. Please grant me leave," I requested him. "Ok, go and inform Pillaivál about everything. We also plan to send him prasádam one day." He told me.

I left mumbling within myself that such a fate should not visit my great teacher. The kitchen official who heard what I told Thambirán, looked visibly relieved.

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On my return, Pillaivál told me, " Had your meal? The fare here would have possibly satisfied your palette." I did not, of course, narrate what happened. I merely told him, "Had enough," and settled down for the lesson.

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39. SAGE COUNSEL

We left Thiruvidaimarudur the next morning. Kumbakonam is on the route to Patteeswaram. Pillaivál wanted to call on Vidwán Thyagarása Chettiár at Kumbakonam.

Thyagarása Chettiár:

I had already heard of the greatness of Thyagarása Chettiár - that he was the chief Tamil pundit in Kumbakonam College, that he was a man of great erudition and that his students have blossomed into good Tamil scholars. In an atmosphere where the Tamil teachers are treated as below par, he commanded respect comparable to teachers in other disciplines.

After I started studying under Pillaivál, there used to be frequent references to Chettiár. I had heard on many occasions persons known to Chettiár heaping praise on his intellectual eminence. I was, therefore, delighted that my teacher planned to see Chettiár. I had once thought of studying under him. I informed my teacher that I was also eager to see Chettiár .

On reaching Kumbakonam the carriage went straight to Chettiár's house. His house was in the South Street adjoining Chakrapáni Perumál temple. When we reached his house he was not there. So we sat down on the house thinnai.

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On noting our arrival, a student of Chettiár rushed to fetch him. He came remonstrating, "Why are you sitting here? Shouldn't you have gone right inside the house? Shouldn't you have arranged for the luggage to be unloaded and taken in?" The first thing he did was to prostrate at the feet of Pillaivál.

His Appearance:

My eyes were riveted on him. His body was gleaming. Fair complexion; neither too tall nor short; of strong build. There was majesty in his gait, brightness in his look and strength in his voice. He was wearing a towel around his waist, well washed and dried. I had heard that he generally dealt with others with disdain and had a penchant to be argumentative. His gait and tone appeared to underscore that reputation. When he paid respect to Pillaivál, his genuine humility was clearly visible amidst an air of nonchalance.

Chettiár looked at Panchanatham Pillai who had come with us and asked him to arrange for cooking. But Pillaivál interjected and said, "We planned to go to Patteeswaram for meal." Then he pointed to me and said, "He normally eats something in the morning. It would be nice if you could arrange for his food somewhere." Chettiár immediately sent me to his friend Ragháváchári's house for my meal. When I returned after my meal, Chettiár asked Pillaivál about me. He told him that I have been studying under him for some time.

As it was new moon day my teacher wanted to reach Patteeswaram early to complete his poojá and other observances, and got ready to leave. At that point Chettiár brought a large sálwar containing two bunches of bananas and candies and humbly placed it before my teacher. He picked up a few bananas and a small helping of candies. We

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also took a small share. Chettiár and a few others walked along with us for some distance.

Chettiár speaks to me:

As we were walking Chettiár asked me, "What are all the texts you have studied?" I replied him in detail. "Ok, what are you presently studying?" I replied suitably.

On hearing Chettiár enquiring about me, Pillaivál was not in a mood to proceed further. He evidently wanted Chettiár to hear my musical rendition of verses and my explanation of their meaning. He told Chettiár, "Why not we settle down somewhere instead of walking. If we sit in one place it would be convenient for him to recite verses."

We were then walking near Kumbeshwarar temple. So my teacher entered through the western tower-gate and sat down in the mandap in front of Sri Subramaniamoorthy shrine. We also sat down.

"Recite some verse and explain its meaning," asked Chettiár. By then I had become well trained in reciting verses musically and explaining their meaning. I chose a verse starting with '*Annámalai Athane*', from *Thuraisai Andháthi*, recited it with music and also explained its meaning. It appeared that he didn't care much for the music part.

"Can You Teach?" :

"You recited a verse from Thuraisai Andháthi. Have you studied the entire work?"

"I know it somewhat."

"Would you be able to teach it?"

I was startled by the question. Thuraisai Andháthi belonged to the Yamagam genre; it was a difficult composi-

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tion. Therefore, it was difficult to understand it fully and to retain it. Chettiár was no doubt aware of this. So I could not quite understand his question.

'Teaching? And, teaching him? If I say I can he might well take me to be arrogant.' I was at a loss. So I didn't give any reply.

My teacher looked at Chettiár and asked him, "Why have you raised this question? Haven't you studied that Andháthi?"

"I had no chance to attend your classes on this text. Didn't you compose this text after you moved to Thiruvávaduthurai? After I came to Kumbakonam I haven't taken lessons from you on your compositions. Still I used to read them for pleasure and also teach students. There is a lot of difference between the texts you have composed after you moved to Thiruvávaduthurai and the earlier texts. The earlier texts lacked philosophical content. The latter texts contained many rare ideas and metaphysical concepts. I find some parts of these texts difficult to understand. When somebody approaches me with one of those texts and requests me to teach them I am nonplussed. Is not the Yamagam element in this Andháthi abstruse? I can get clarity on these aspects only by discussing with you. A few months ago Sadásivam Pillai had come from Thiruchiráppalli. He had brought this Thuraisai Andháthi and pestered me to teach the text. I read it; it was not clear to me. I sent him away suggesting that he may approach Ayyá Avargal. Didn't he come to you?"

"No, he didn't. If someone else comes to me and bothers me to explain the meaning of the text I thought I would shunt him on to this student of yours. Hence my question."

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"Dump it in the river"

At that point Ârumugatthá Pillai asked Chettiár, "Have you studied all the earlier compositions of Ayyá? During his early days Ayyá had authored a 'Padhitruppatthu Andháthi' for Patteeswaram. Have you studied it?"

"What? An Andháthi for Patteeswaram? I haven't read it. Come on, if you do remember why don't you recite a verse from this text?" This was Chettiár .

At once Ârumugatthá Pillai recited a verse. On hearing it Chettiár stared at Ârumugatthá Pillai and my teacher. "How do you know that this verse is Pillaivál's composition?" Chettiár asked.

"Why not? Wouldn't I be knowing a Prabandham about my place? Ayyá had composed it during my father's days."

"Do you have a copy of this book? If so, without telling anyone tear it apart and throw it in the river. You should also flush it out of your mind. You better not tell anyone that Ayyá had composed a text like this."

"Why are you saying such things?"

"Why not? Ayyá's current readers would not believe that these verses were also composed by him. In fact, they would even call you mad. Ayyá's current compositions are all nuggets of gold. When we are discussing fine compositions, reference to such verses borders on sacrilege."

The verse recited by Ârumugatthá Pillai appeared to be nice.

Varaimá dhirukku morukoorum
Mazhumá nanindha Thirukkaramum
Araiser vengai yadhaludaiyum
Aravá paranath thaganmárbum

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Viraiser kondrai mudiyumarai
Mevu madiyum velithotri
Naraiser vidaiyán driruppazhaisai
Nagari larulap petraenae!'

("Blessed was I
In sacred Thirumazhisai
By Lord Almighty,
Of presence magnificent _
Riding white bull
Devi as his one half
Axe and deer, adorning hands
Tiger skin as garment
Snake bedecking broad chest
Locks with floral fragrance
Feet sanctified by Vedas
Benediction by Lord resplendent.")

This was the verse. It contained no Yamagam, no Thiribu, no Saiva Siddhántha concepts. Limpid in style the verse contained a message of hope and love. At that point I did not find Chettiár's harsh words either appropriate or agreeable. Further I thought that he was also contradicting himself. Earlier he had complained that Thuraisai Yamaga Andháthi was opaque and difficult to understand. Now he finds no beauty in a verse with transparent meaning.

Ârumugathá Pillai was not unduly concerned about the poetic merit of the verse. He was inclined to heap praise on the text dealing with his own village. He was saddened by Chettiár's strident criticism.

"You better ask Ayyá himself. You will get to know that this text has been authored by him. Your vilifying his work is not quite in order." Ârumugatthá Pillai told Chettiár.

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Saying "I may as well ask Ayyá" Chettiár unleashed a volley of questions at Pillaivál: "The man is saying something; is it true? Have you composed a text like this? Don't try to simply support him. Recall carefully and tell me. Why at all did you author such a text?"

After listening to these exchanges patiently Pillaivál replied, "Hei Thyágarásu, you seem to be going on and on. Couldn't I have authored a text like this? Is there any blemish in it? Is it a crime to compose verses which are easy to read and understand? If the meaning is clear, is it not a virtue? Any special merit in making a text opaque and difficult?"

Chettiár replied: "If you think so, I have no problem. My only concern was that this should not sully your reputation. Ok, it is getting late for you. You may like to leave."

Not a Split Personality:

I did not imagine that Chettiár would talk to Pillaivál with such casual familiarity. He had registered his role as a student with affection and humility. While discussing things he spoke as a friend and a soulmate. He expressed his views in a forthright manner, without burying them in his mind out of a false sense of respect. Those who heard his outspoken expression of views for the first time could well mistake him to be rude and arrogant. But those who understood his true nature would know that there was no discordance between his thought and word and that he was given to expressing his opinion in a candid manner.

Sage Counsel:

Chettiár stood up. So did we. "You must study assiduously under Ayyá. Thinking that it is an honour to be with him, you should not end up being lazy. After studying under

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him for some time, you should not imagine that you've mastered everything and run away. You cannot find a teacher as great as he is. I'm saying this only in your interest." Chettiár advised me. I found those words to be sage counsel. I have so far heard others extolling Pillaivál's greatness and underlining my good fortune to be his student. But Chettiár advised me how I should conduct myself. He didn't praise me; so what? He showed me the way to make my life meaningful. I found his words full of experiential wisdom, nectarine.

Chettiár and those who came with him took leave of us and returned. We set out to Patteeswaram.

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40. STUDYING IN PATTEESWARAM

It is not necessary to study thousands of verses of a poet to realize his greatness. True poetic finesse can gleam even in one poem; even in one line. Instead of churning out thousands of insipid verses it is a greater achievement to create a few poems surcharged with aesthetic merit.

On reaching Patteeswaram my teacher told me: "Most Tamil scholars know about one Satthimutra Pulavar. A single 'Agaval' created by him made him truly famous. '*Nárái Nárái – Sengál Nárái*' ('Heron! Heron! Red-legged Heron!) clearly manifests his instinctive poetic personality. He calls out to the Heron as 'with a mouth like young palmyra root split into two halves'. This simile reportedly captivated a Pándyá king, 'How beautifully has a poet described his predicament - shivering in cold and covering his bare torso with emaciated hands! Even his own misery does not trouble him much. The travails of his wife plunges him in despair. The poet who created this remarkable poem lived in this village."

Satthimutram:

"Is this not Patteeswaram?" I asked. "Yes; there, that is Satthimutram temple. Patteeswaram and Satthimutram are close to each other. The North Street of Patteeswaram extends as a South Street of Satthimutram."

"Are the descendants of the poet still around here?"

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"Yes. One of them is knowledgeable in Tamil. You will get to see him."

Wherever Pillaivál went it was his practice to explain to those with him historical information about that place; and if it is a holy site, refer to the Puránás, if any, related to it. He had considerable knowledge about the holy sites of Tamil Nadu. He used to incorporate in his compositions some of the details from the puránás related to such holy sites.

The Palace Wall:

Before we entered Patteeswaram we happened to see a tall dilapidated structure. It appeared to be a corner of two huge conjoining walls. It was taller than a typical palymra tree. On observing it closely we thought that it was a part of a fortress in ruins.

"How come there is such a huge structure in this place?" I asked my teacher.

"This place is Cholan Máligai (Chola Palace), one of the places in the neighbourhood of Patteeswaram. The people here used to say that there was one Cholá palace here and that this structure was a fortified wall of the palace.

Pazhaiyárai:

The places around Patteeswaram were full of ruins attesting to their ancient history. Apart from the bits of information I had collected during my stay in Patteeswaram, I had also learnt many details later from literature as also from rock and copper plate inscriptions. Pazhaiyárai was a provincial capital during Cholá rule and had since got split into many small villages. In his Periya Puránam epic, Sekkizhár has lauded this town '*Páril Neediya Perumaiser padhi Pazhaiyárai* '('Pazhaiyárai, the holy site of glory

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great, in this world'). Now only a village by name Keezhai Pazhaiyárai bears witness to that ancient name. Many of those places reputed earlier due to their historical significance became dear to people's heart due to the sanctity associated with holy sites. Even this sentiment is now in decline.

We stayed in Ârumugatthá Pillai's house in Patteeswaram. He lived there like a veritable zamindár. He played host to Pillaivál with considerable love and respect. He arranged for my food in one Appádurai Iyer's house in the agraháram there.

Nandhi that Stepped Aside:

On our first evening at Patteeswaram, Pillaivál went outside for a stroll. I accompanied him. He took me to the nearby river Thirumalairáyanáru. Patteeswaran temple was on the way. I observed that the Nandhidevá (the stone image of bull, the mount of Lord Shivá) was not, as usual, directly in front of the sanctum sanctorum, but was shifted sideways. As one who had been involved in the study of Nandanár Charitram, I was reminded of the Nandhi in Thirupunkur stepping aside to facilitate Nandanár having a clear darshan of Lord Shiva. Noting a trace of surprise on my face my teacher explained to me: "The great Saivite saint Thirugnánasambandamurthy Náyanár had come from Thirucchatthimutram to have a darshan of Lord Shiva consecrated as Dhenupureeshwarar at this temple and the Lord had directed the Nandhi to step aside so that He could have á clear view of his devotee. Hence, the shifting of this Nandhi's position."

Melaipazhaiyárai:

Then we went to the Thirumalairáyan river and completed our ritual observances. Melaipazhaiyárai village

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was situated south of this river. A substantial portion of that village was owned by Ârumugatthá Pillai. That village abounded in natural wealth. He had constructed a lovely house in the midst of a grove teeming with coconut, mango, jack-fruit and areca trees. Even during the hottest part of the day we would not feel the heat there. Pillaivál went there often and took lessons. During the afternoons Ârumugatthá Pillai would offer fruits and tender coconut water. It was a place where one could spend time in joyous ease.

Ârumugatthá Pillai's Nature:

Ârumugatthá Pillai was a quintessential benefactor; had no inhibition in spending his wealth on others. He fancied himself as a local feudal lord and exercised his authority. He never tired of playing host to visitors. When Pillaivál stayed in his house, each day was a celebration. Everyday some persons kept coming from places like Kumbakonam to call on Pillaivál. The Tamil teachers of schools in neighbouring villages came on Saturdays and Sundays to get their doubts resolved. All these visitors had their meals in Ârumugatthá Pillai's house. He used to have a spread of feast with a view to impressing the visitors with his wealth. As he had been acquainted with Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt he had a desire to replicate the arrangements at the Mutt in the range of food items and in the manner of treating guests.

Ârumugatthá Pillai behaved modestly only with Pillaivál. He treated others with cultivated disdain. Everyone should respect his will. Otherwise he would fly into a fury. In this anger he would severely punish some poor people.

Nágai Puránam:

I had taken a few Prabandham texts with me. In a few days I completed learning these texts one by one. So I had

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no other book with me to study further. I mentioned this to my teacher.

"Thambi* has a good supply of books. We can get some from him. To begin with let's take up *Thirunágai Károna Puránam*." He also got the book from Ârumugathá Pillai.

As I had not till then studied any text composed by Pillaivál, I had a special interest in studying this Puránam. I remembered looking in wonderment at this book in Sadagopa Iyengár's house in Ariyiloor and also Pillaivál explaining the meaning of a few verses from the text when I joined him. The expectation that I could study this text under him for a few weeks gave me a special thrill.

I started studying this Puránam. The class would commence early morning. I would study upto eight. Then I would go to Agraháram, have my breakfast of cold rice and continue my study. The lessons would continue till ten or eleven. After lunch Pillaivál would take rest; I would study again as soon as he woke up. During the afternoons visitors would call on him and be engaged in discussions. We would go to Thirumalairáyan river in the evening, and return via the Agraháram. I would go to the house serving me food and have my meal. Till I came out my teacher would be patiently sitting in that house thinnai; he would be sitting there all alone in the dark. Sometimes the owner would bring a lamp and place it near him. I would have a quick meal and come out. My teacher would take me to Ârumugathá Pillai's house. Lesson would commence straightaway.

As I was so studying without a break I could learn a

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* *Thambi means younger brother. Pillaivál used ot refer to Ârumugathá Pillai as 'Thambi'.*

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large number of verses during my stay in Patteeswaram. To begin with I studied about fifty verses from Nágai Puránam everyday. After a couple of weeks the number increased to hundred verses and sometimes even two hundred. My eagerness to study was matched by my guru's satisfaction in teaching. So the lessons proceeded smoothly and fast. Because of this tempo I could not fix in my mind some of the verses properly. My teacher discerned this and told me, "Let us not proceed so fast. Hereafter, after dealing with each verse you better summarize its meaning." I started doing so accordingly. This new method conferred a number of benefits on me: firstly I could clearly understand the meaning of each verse; secondly I developed a capacity to articulate any idea in a well-structured and fault-free manner.

During the lessons my guru would explain many aspects of Literature and Grammar; and also provide highlights from several epics.

Nágai Puránam was completed. As I was not totally satisfied, I wanted to listen to the exposition of the verses for a second time. My teacher was gracious enough to go through it once again. Now I was able to understand several aspects which I had missed in the first round.

Commencing Máyura Puránam:

After completing Nágai Puránam he suggested that we could take up Máyura Puránam. That text was also authored by him. The Puránam contained 1894 verses. *Thirunágai Károna Puránam* and *Máyura Sthala Puránam* were both published by Pillaivál, with printing assistance provided by Soda Sávadhánam T.Subbaráya Chettiár, a student of his from Chennai. Nágai Puránam had gained considerable reputation those days. Pillaivál's students and others used to admire Nágai Puránam as the best of his compositions. I

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was very happy that I got an opportunity to study this text twice directly under the author himself. Till then I had not fully realized the expanse of Tamil literature; so the many aspects of this Puránam lent me great joy.

I nursed a desire to learn all compositions of Pillaivál one by one. He got a copy of Máyura Puránam from Ârumugathá Pillai and started lessons on that text. This gave me a new shot of enthusiasm. 'It is a good fortune that we came to Patteeswaram. There is an uninterrupted and quick flow of lessons. Windows have opened to find epics too.' I was filled with joy. 'This is not going to be an enduring pleasure. You may also have to realize the darker side of Patteeswaram stay.' I had no such foreboding then.

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41. STRANGE WAYS

I used to nurse a dread of Ârumugatthá Pillai. While he was generally helpful to others, he always wore a scowl on his face for reasons best known to him. While I dealt with him with great caution he hardly developed any affection towards me. He held Pillaivál in considerable respect and was also fond of him. He knew that Pillaivál lavished affection on me. Even so he was in no mood to spare a pleasant face for me. Possibly Pillaivál's affection for me had made him nurse an animus towards me.

Pillaivál's love and concern for me lent me enough courage to counter all kinds of obstacles.

Midnight Feast:

Ârumugatthá Pillai's habits were indeed strange. After completing his ritual observances in the evening, he would settle down to read *Kanda Puránam* in front of Pillaivál. If he requested, Pillaivál would explain the meaning of difficult terms. There was nothing to suggest that he was reading Kanda Puránam properly or was an ardent student of the text. But he would derive pleasure by bragging to everyone that he was studying the Puránam and that too under the illustrious teacher. This routine would continue till nine in the night.

If he came to read his Kanda Puránam during my lesson, I would immediately close the book and stop my lesson due to a fear that he would take it as an affront. I would also be attentive when he reads the Puránam.

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After nine in the night everyone would retire to bed; of course, without having dinner. Past midnight Ârumugatthá Pillai would order the serving of meal; would wake up everyone and urge them to eat. If some visitors from outside were sleeping on the thinnai, he would wake them up too and ask them to partake of the food.

When the midnight meal was being served I should sit by Pillaivál's side and take my lessons. This was Ârumugatthá Pillai's dictum.

After everyone retired to bed around nine I would study for a while and then go to sleep. When Pillaivál returned at sunset after completing his ritual ablutions, I would complete my meal in the agraháram. What benefit could I have derived by waking up at midnight and studying when Pillaivál was having his meal? I would be very sleepy. While eating how could my Master teach without any hindrance? I took this lesson at that late hour not to reap any benefit. It was only to satisfy Ârumugatthá Pillai's strange ways.

Ârumugatthá Pillai's Anger:

On occasions I would continue my sleep at midnight without waking up. It meant that there was no lesson that night. On such occasions, after his meal, Ârumugatthá Pillai would wake me up and scold me. If he forgot to wake me up he would make sure I got my share of scolding the next morning. "How could you ever learn? Eating and sleeping seem to be your sole preoccupations. You are well and truly a lazy bum. What other blooming work do you have than to wake up at night and learn lessons from your master?" he would spout fury.

Instead of moving with persons who would not even try to understand others' difficulties, it is better to steer clear

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of them. I had no means of assuaging Ârumugatthá Pillai's anger. I would simply stand tongue-tied bemoaning my fate.

Mystery of the Missing Book:

One midnight I had missed my lesson; I did not rise from my sleep when others did. Next morning I completed my morning chores and set out to study. I looked for the book in the place where I had left it the previous night. The book was gone. Those days I was studying Máyura Purá-nam. I searched for the book in a few places; no trace of it. With a view to studying some other text I went to the place where I had left the bundle of books; that bundle was miss-ing too. It was Ârumugatthá Pillai's gracious act! I trembled at the thought as to what more harm his anger could cause. I was sad at my predicament.

I went to my teacher with a withered face and told him that the books were missing. He directed the servants there to search for the books. They couldn't find them either. "We may mention this to Thambi," he said.

Ârumugatthá Pillai had not yet woken up from his sleep. He normally slept till eight in the morning. He would sit up in the bed around eight, with his eyes still firmly closed. He would call aloud "Duraisámi" for his son. That boy would stand before him and ask him, "What?" He would then set his eyes on his son's face. Then only would he rise from bed and come out. He had a superstition that the day would be full of joy if he saw his son's face first thing in the morning. If happiness can be earned so easily everyone in the world can adopt this trick.

Ârumugatthá Pillai invariably adopted this practice ev-ery morning. But there was no evidence that his life was full of joy.

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I knew fully well that if I went to Ârumugatthtá Pillai in the morning in the midst of his carefully orchestrated waking-up regimen, and tell him that my books were missing, he would sure get furious. So I did not do so as suggested by my teacher, but stood silently with a careworn face.

'Compose a Verse':

After a while Ârumugatthá Pillai woke up from his slumber and was passing that way. Looking at my standing in front of my teacher, he yelled, "Why is he standing here? Why isn't he studying?" My teacher gently told him, "I understand his books are missing."

"That's the matter, is it? How can a student study properly if he doesn't even bother to take care of his books? Ayyá teaching this guy seems to be a fruitless task. How can he be so negligent?" Firing this salvo he left.

'Why not I simply give up and return home?' I started wondering. I didn't have the courage to answer his acid words.

He came back. "He has been studying for so long. Has he developed any competence in Tamil? You have been teaching him tirelessly; does he have the capacity to think clearly and understand things? If he had studied properly and attentively under your tutelage, he must have developed a capacity to compose verses in Tamil. Why don't you ask him to compose one? If he does it before I came back I'll arrange to get hold of his books. Otherwise, I'll buy him new books."

My teacher looked at me and directed, "Why don't you write a verse concerning Thambi; let's see."

With a view to keeping an eye on me Ârumugatthá Pillai left a servant behind to keep guard. "The completed

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poem should be ready by the time I come," he warned.

What Perversion!:

Pillaivál took me to another place. The guy standing guard tailed us. As we were going I had mentally composed a Vennpá. I started reciting the Vennpá to my teacher -

'*Seermaravu márumuga chemmalae*' (Eminence embodied, Árumugá, the Great). Pillaivál heard this line, said that we would deal with it presently, and disposed of the guy standing there telling him, "You better go to my attendant and ask him to get the place ready for my poojá." Then he turned to me and said, "The line you have composed can be read so as to take '*Márumugá*' as one phrase; this could mean 'an exemplar of duplicity'. I'm afraid that Thambi could get furious on hearing this. You should not compose verses providing scope for such interpretations." Thereafter he himself composed a Vennpá and gave it to me. I committed it to memory.

That Verse:

When Ârumugatthá Pillai again passed that way, I went up to him and recited my teacher's Vennpá with great modesty.

'Árumuga Boopálá vanbilár polenpál
Márumugam kondál madhippavarár - kooru Thamizh
Vásikka vandhavanmel vanmamenna yávarumae
Nesikku mádhayaisei 'nee'

(Arumugá, Protector of Earth!
Like one bereft of affection
Should you turn your face away
Who'll respect me?

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Come have I but to learn Tamil
Why this animus?
Seek I thy grace
To make all love me.)

As I was reciting the poem there was a trace of happiness on his face. My reference to him as '*Bhoopálá*' (Protector of Earth) must have sure pleased him. As I was observing some happiness in his face I felt reassured that he might not find fault with the verse and yell at me.

Crisis Averted:

"Hereafter study your lesson carefully. Give up idleness. Learn to compose verses," he started doling out advice. At that point a servant brought my bundle of books and also *Máyura Puránam* text. He picked up the Máyura Puránam text from the servant and handed it over to me. He then directed the servant to replace the bundle of books in its original place. I took the Puránam text and went to my guru. With a sense of relief that I had escaped from a crisis I narrated everything to my teacher.

He explained the methodology of composing verses, citing several examples. Then he continued Máyura Puránam lesson from where we had left.

I must confess that my first attempt at mentally composing a verse resulted from Ârumugatthá Pillai's directive; but it stopped short of getting written. The line '*Seermaravu márumuga chemmalae*' alone is retained in my memory. God only knows how the 'great' Ârumuga Bhoopálar with an amazing capacity for a chameleon-like changes of mood would have dealt with me if only he had learnt about my version of the verse.

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42. SILEDAI AND YAMAGAM

While at Patteeswaram Pillaivàl used to visit Kumbakonam and other places off and on. I also used to accompany him. One day we visited the temple in Patteeswaram and offered worship. In the Devi sanctum sanctorum of the temple there were icons of Sri Govinda Dikshithar and his wife; we savoured that sight. Sri Govinda Dishithar was a minister under a Thanjàvur king by name Acchudappa Náicker, and was well known for his philanthropy. He was known to have lived in Patteeswaram Agrahàram.

Siledai Verse (A Play on Words):

On one occasion we went to Lord Subramanyá's holy site of Swámimalai and offered worship to Lord Murugá (Subramanyá). This site is said to be the same as Thiruvenkadam, one of the six holy abodes of Murugá. Sri Swáminathan is the consecrated name of the Murugá deity there. Ārumugatthá Pillai also came with us.

After the darshan we returned to Patteeswaram. When we reached the banks of Káveri we saw silk weavers cleaning silk yarn in the river. Ārumugattha Pillai suddenly turned towards me and said, "Compose a Vennpá with a

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Siledai element linking this thread and water; better complete it in ten minutes."

'What a pest he is!' was the thought uppermost in my mind; I did not feel like attempting to compose a verse at his whim. If he had asked me to do that in a pleasant manner I might have got enthused. The very thought of having to bow down to his imperious dictate sapped my enthusiasm.

It was evident to me that my teacher felt sorry at Ārumugatthá Pillai's offensive manner. "What Thambi, is it possible to spin out a Siledai verse at the drop of a hat? Can poems be composed mechanically?" Pillaivál told him. Then he turned towards me and said, " I'll compose the first two lines for a verse with Siledai. You compose the next two lines and complete the verse."

'Vellainirath thàrseyarkkai meviye veruniram
Kollugaiyàr royak kuriyinàl.'

('Pure white thread
Transform it does
Into a hue different
On such dipping').

He started the first two lines. The thought about Āárumugatthá Pillai and his asking me to compose a verse vanished from my mind. I was amazed that my teacher so easily put together the first two lines of a Siledai composition. He repeated the two lines and asked me to complete the verse. I thought for a while and did the bidding.

The full verse ran like this:

'Vellainirath thárseyarkkai meviye veruniram
Kollugaiyár royak kuriyinál ullavanbil
Thái nernda várumugath thálalá neemozhindha
áinoolu neeruniga ràm.

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('Pure white thread
Transform it does
Into hue different
On such dipping
O Ārumugá the benevolent
Like a Mother brimming with love you are
Like fine thread and limpid water')

This is the parallel. White thread assumes different colours according to the colour of the dipping solution. Clear river water assumes a colour of the soil over which the river flows.

I continued to nurse a misgiving as to whether Ārumugatthá Pillai would pick holes in the verse. My teacher stepped in to save me. Even before Ārumugatthá Pillai could express his opinion Pillaivál said, "It's good. The line '*Ullavanbil thài Nerndha Ārumugath Thalálan*' (O Ārumugá, the benevolent, like a mother brimming with love') is indeed appropriate. It highlights how Thambi treasures in his heart abundant love". A faint smile appeared on Ārumugatthá Pillai's face.

We returned to Patteeswaram. Lessons continued. Ārumugatthá Pillai's affection and despotism appeared alternately.

Yamaga Verse:

We went to Patteeswaram temple one morning. Ārumugatthá Pillai also came with us. Lord Vinàyakà consecrated on the western side of the main shrine was called Madhavàrana Pillayàr. When I was offering worship to that idol, Ārumugatthá Pillai told me, "Compose a verse in Yamagam using the holy name of this Vináyaká." Yamagam composition is no easy matter. It is difficult enough even to make sense of Yamagam verse. And to compose Yamagam

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verse in a jiffy was next to impossible. I could only gape helplessly. My grief knew no bounds.

True I did not sob but my anguish was writ large on my face. My teacher didn't fail to notice it. It was evident that he had reached the limit of his patience. He looked at Ārumugatthá Pillai. "What Thambi, you keep giving him difficult tasks of versification. Is it at all proper? He has a capacity to compose verses but, if you keep coercing him, can he compose poetry? Poetry has to ripen on its own and cannot be beaten into a fruit." Ārumugatthá Pillai fell silent. It was not clear whether he realized and accepted his mistake. Out of deference to the great teacher he kept quiet.

As soon as we reached home my teacher himself composed a Yamaga stanza on 'Madhavárana Pillayár, asked me to write it down and directed me to read it to Ārumugatthá Pillai. I did so accordingly.

Vow Broken:

It is our family practice to collect rice as ritual alms from a few houses on Purattási Saturdays, cook that rice and eat only one meal that day. Our ancestors used to wear wet clothes after the morning bath, visit others' houses, silently collect the ritual alms in a moist towel; they had adopted this as a ritual vow.

This practice was called 'Taking Gopálam'. When I was in Patteeswaram I set out for my bath on the first Saturday of Purattási month to take Gopálam. Ārumugathá Pillai enquired with me what was the matter. I explained it to him. This infuriated him. "Are you a Vaishnavite? You better keep such austerities to your own village. No such thing within the boundaries of this village. It is indeed strange that, while moving with us Saivites, you should even think

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of indulging in such things." He started chastising me. He also sent word to the house where I was taking my meals not to give me food if I chose to bring Gopàlam rice. I was at a loss what to do. I had a belief that evil consequences would follow if I broke this time-honoured practice. I was also scared that if there was any detriment to the vow in honour of our family deity Sri Venkatàchalapathy, my family would come to harm. I was strongly anchored in this belief nurtured over generations by my family. I skipped food that noon. I went to the coconut grove and lay down there tossing in hunger. I lamented my fate that I was being subjected to such hardships.

The people in the house where I had been having my meals were sad that I had not turned up for lunch. As they came to the coconut grove and pressed me, I had my meal by five in the evening. I bade farewell to the Purattási Saturday vow.

While at Máyuram I faced no such difficulty. Further Saverinátha Pillai's friendship lent happiness to my days there. His jovial ways could dispel any grief. But, I had no such friendship in Patteeswaram.

Saverinátha Pillai's Arrival:

Fortunately Pillaivál sent word to Máyuram asking Saverinátha Pillasi to come to Patteeswaram. Needless to say that I was elated when he arrived at Patteeswaram. I was looking forward to his pleasant company.

Soon after he came Saverinátha Pillai achieved something great. The midnight meal practice in Ārumugatthá Pillai's house was halted due to his intervention. He was used to expressing his opinions boldly. He composed a verse meaning 'Lord Bramha had not created us as mere trees to languish without food at night in this Patteeswaram.'

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Not only did he compose the verse but was also chanting it loudly at every turn. Ārumugatthá Pillai also had to hear it. Saverinátha Pillai explained things in a sauve manner and managed to change Ārumugatthá Pillai's mind. Thereafter night meal was served at ten. Pillaivàl, myself and several others applauded Saverinàtha Pillai's courage and astuteness. I was happy that Ārumugatthá Pillai had finally found his match in Saverinátha Pillai.

Thanks to Saverinàtha Pillai's geniality and my teacher's affection, the bitterness of Patteeswaram stay disappeared.

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43. SARASWATHI POOJĀ AND DEEPĀVALI

A few months had elapsed since I came under Pillaivál's tutelage. I had joined him in Chittirai month (1871 April); we had spent Purattási month in Patteeswaram. I had learnt a lot during these six months. Apart from learning many matters concerning Tamil literature and grammar, I also learnt the nuances of the nature and quality of a variety of people. I had seen persons endowed with wealth, learning and renunciation. Among them I had seen people of modesty and also those filled with arrogance. I also happened to encounter persons with genuine affection and those putting on an appearance of affability. I moved with persons of nobility eager to be helpful in their own indigence. I encountered an interplay of happiness and travails. A canal branches off from the Thirumalairáyan river at Patteeswaram. While bathing in the river one day I was caught in a vortex. Two persons plunged into the river and saved me.

I developed a longing to meet my relatives. My parents were then living in Sooryamoolai. Utthamadánapuram was close to Patteeswaram. So I nursed a desire to go there and meet my uncle and aunt. Purattási signalled the beginning of Navarátri. I took leave of my teacher and went to

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Utthamadánapuram for Saraswathi poojá. While I left, my guru told me to return only after spending four days there. He possibly wanted me to get a break at least for a few days from the problems I had been facing in Patteeswaram.

Vijayadasami:

I was in Utthamadánapuram for Saraswathi poojá. Initially I had planned to spend a few days there. After Saraswathi poojá I performed the concluding worship. Is not Vijayadasami a special day for students? It is the practice in our country to commence a new lesson that day under one's teacher. I developed a desire to get a book from Pillaivál's hand that day. 'I was with my guru all these days and on this important day I am away from him; this is not correct. I should somehow see Pillaivál today.' I was determined. My uncle insisted that I should spend two more days there. He and my aunt were very fond of me. They would never use a single harsh word against me. "Sámá, we had not seen you for six full months. I was planning to come to Máyuram. But, because of pressure of work here, I couldn't make it. I'm so happy that you've come. Now you want to return so soon. If you miss lessons for four days, would it be such a terrible loss?" He tried to persuade me. He was a munsiff of that village. I knew that he had considerable work pressure. My aunt also pressurized me to stay for a few more days.

"I sure have no objection to stay longer here. Today is Vijayadasami day. It is important for me to get a book from the hands of my guru today. I'll come some other day." I took leave of them and left for Patteeswaram in the afternoon.

I reached Patteeswaram around four. On seeing me my teacher asked, "Why have you returned so soon?"

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"Today is Vijayadasami. I've come because I wanted to get some books from Ayyá's hands today."

End of Evil Days:

Pillaivál immediately asked his attendant to bring a palm-leaf manuscript from amongst the many kept as a part of poojá. He did so accordingly, and Pillaivál handed it over to me. I received it very eagerly. "Why don't you turn the leaves and find out what text it is?" he told me. I found that it was Naidatham. "It is a general belief that bad days would disappear if you read Naidatham. Your evil days are now over. Dispel all worries." On hearing his words I got goose-flesh. Pillaivál had realized that I was encountering many problems in Patteeswaram and had been scarred by these travails. That explained his words of consolation. Would words born of genuine love ever go in vain?

"When I first received Naidatham from Ayyá at Máyuram, I had thought likewise," I told him. I read out a few verses from Naidatham in Ayyá's presence. That filled me with profound satisfaction. Till then Vijayadasami days had come and gone each year. But, on this Vijayadasami day I had the good fortune of receiving a book from such a great teacher. So it had a special significance for me.

Ucchishta Ganapathi Darshan:

Saverinátha Pillai and I continued our study. We all went once to Kumbakonam and met Thyágarása Chettiár. He had also come to Patteeswaram a few times. One day we went to Sathimutram temple and had our darshan. There is a traditional belief that the Devi there had been performing penance for the Lord, and when he appeared she embraced Him. There is an icon in the temple depicting this scene. Near the entrance to the temple, there is a shrine for Uch-

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chishta Ganapathi. I had heard elders say that one would be blessed with good learning by paying homage to this icon. I was lost in prayer with this thought.

Deepávali in Kottur:

After Purattási came the Aippasi month. Deepávali was nearing. I had a desire to see my parents and my infant younger brother. I told Pillaivál of my desire to spend the Deepávali with my parents. "By all means," my teacher said. While I was leaving he gave me two pieces of angavastram with silk-thread border and told me, "You can use it for Deepávali. Have a pleasant ritual Deepávali bath, stay there for a few days and come straight to Máyuram. I plan to go there for Deepávali."

I was touched by this gesture. I received the angavastrams with genuine humility and took leave of him.

Kottur is a sacred Saivite site, celebrated in Theváram hymns; was east of Kanjanoor, the birth place of Haradatta Siváchárjár; was west of Thugili where lived Sozhiya Brahmins who were teachers of Kárkátha Vellállás. It is referred to as Kodai in literature.

My father, who had been moving constantly among Kanjanoor, Thugili and Manalur, was then staying in my mother's younger sister's house in Kottoor. My parents were spending a few days to enjoy bathing in Káveri river during the Thulá month. My grand father had also come there from Sooryamoolai. Káveri takes a northern course in Kottoor. This prompted many to go there for a dip. My visit there helped me meet many of my kinsmen together. Everyone enquired about my welfare and about the progress in my studies. Appá was very happy on seeing the angavastrams. Ammá's happiness was all the more. "It is all God's

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grace. Realizing our limitations He has brought in such a noble person. All, divine benediction." Her heart was full.

I had my ritual Deepávali bath. I donned the angavastrams so graciously gifted by my guru. It gave me a special thrill.

A Gentleman:

While at Kottoor, many persons made fond enquiries about Pillaivál. They were all praise for him. But, are all persons in the world of the same opinion? Among those who praised things noble, there are also some who can dismiss it as foul. One day a person known to my father visited us. He was chatting for a long time. "What is your son doing?' he enquired. "Studying Tamil," said my father. As if having heard something strange, he exclaimed, "What? You mean Tamil?" He did not stop there. "You mean he is studying Tamil? Shouldn't he be learning English? English will help him in this world. Sanskrit can provide key to heaven. Tamil will be useless for either." When he elaborated his point in this manner I was startled.

I was interested in finding out who was the guy who volunteered such an unsolicited opinion expressed with studied insensitivity. I enquired with my father after the person left. Alas! He didn't know English; didn't know Sanskrit; and was totally ignorant in Tamil. It came to light that in line with his opinion, he had not bothered to take care of here or hereafter. Whenever I meet self-satisfied worthies loudly proclaiming their opinions without any credential or devoid of sensitivity towards others' feelings, I would get reminded of this guy from Kottur.

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Fever:

I was in Kottur for six weeks. I was down with severe fever a few days after Deepávali. I suffered a lot. A traditional physician in that village by name Chakrapáni treated me. "The child was doing well out of our eyesight. Now he is here, and our misfortune appears to have infected him too." My mother lamented.

As I had not returned to Máyuram after Deepávali my teacher got worried and sent a messenger to Kottur to make enquiries. He was saddened on knowing about my illness. He sent messengers frequently to check on my progress. 'Is this not true love and grace?' The people in the village were lost in wonder.

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44. THIRUVĀVADUTHURAI IMPRESSIONS

By the end of Márkazhi month I was completely cured of my fever; still I was somewhat weak. My yearning to go back to Pillaivál and resume my lessons was on the rise. I recalled that when he left for Patteeswaram, Subramania Desikar had directed him to return to Thiruvávaduthurai and take lessons for the students there. So I thought he would be in Thiruvávaduthurai. Possibly he was still in Máyuram, I wondered. On knowing about my doubt my father set out to Thiruvávaduthurai to find out where Pillaivál was then staying.

Father's Enquiry:

Father met Sri Kumárasámi Thambirán at the Shivá temple in Thiruvávaduthurai. As father had already known Thambirán he enquired with him about Pillaivál. He told my father that Pillaivál was still in Máyuram, but was expected to come to Thiruvávaduthurai for Gurupoojá scheduled for the Thai month; he also enquired about my health.

On returning from Sooryamoolai, my father informed me about Pillaivál's whereabouts and told me, "Only a few days are left for Gurupoojá. If you now go to Máyuram you should soon be leaving for Thiruvávaduthurai with Pillaivál. As he would be in Thiruvávaduthurai for the Guru-

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poojá it is better you go there straight and join him." I was looking forward for the Gurupoojá celebrations.

Unfolding Scenes:

On the Aswathi star day in Thai month Gurupoojá is celebrated to honour the memory of Sri Namachiváyamoorthy, the founder saint of Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam. I reached Thiruvávaduthurai along with my cousin Gopála Iyer, it was not the Thiruvávaduthurai I had seen earlier. The people in the neighbouring villages were speaking effusively of the Gurupoojá. I got an impression that It would be a grand celebration but, what I saw that day far exceeded my imagination.

There were milling crowds everywhere. I saw a representative cross-section of Tamil people there. People of four varnás and those from Pándyá and Cholá lands were all there. How many kinds of scholars! I saw hundreds of music vidwáns. These crowds included those who delivered religious discourses, vocal musicians and also experts in Veená, Flute, 'Gottu' stringed instrument, and Violin. Amongst Sanskrit scholars were many who were deeply versed in different Shástrás. Vedic chanting was going on in the temple and in other places. Adorned with a liberal coat of holy ash and wearing Rudrákshá beads, and with a gleam in their faces, Oduvárs were melodiously chanting Theváram hymns.

Thambiráns had arrived from different locations. Many distinguished disciples of the Mutt had come with their offerings. Even if they were not able to have a darshan of their Gnána guru on the other occasions, they made it a point to have his sacred darshan on the Gurupoojá day each year. Sri Subramanya Desikar's affection-filled words captivated them. Even those from the southern parts of Tamil

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Nadu had made it a special vow to participate in the Gurupoojá. Their carriages were parked in different parts of Thiruvávaduthurai. Many had come with their families.

Annadánam:

Annadánam or Ceremonial Feeding was a special feature of Gurupoojá. Feeding was assured for all visitors, and to mark this special occasion, Annadánam flag was hoisted in the Mutt premises on the first day of celebration. Many mendicants and the poor who had remained famished for many days had access to sumptuous meals, and heartily praised the organizers. Special arrangements were also made to feed Brahmins.

The splendour of Gurupoojá resonated in every street and home. As if it is their own family celebration, each house and street was decorated with festoons and strings of mango leaves. The guests were welcomed and feted. Gurupoojá was not merely a Mutt celebration; it was Thiruvávaduthurai's own festival. One could even say it belonged to entire Tamil Nadu. People from all parts of Tamil Nadu had thronged there and were taking part in the festivities.

Temple's Greatness:

The greatness of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt lent a name and esteem to that town. Even otherwise it had been sanctified by reference in *Theváram*. Tradition has it that Thirugnánasambandamoorthy Náyanár had obtained thousand gold sovereigns from Lord Shivá at that holy site, to meet the costs of a ritual sacrifice performed by his Father. So Lord Thyágarájamoorthy there is called Swarna(gold) Thyágar.

The holy name of the Lord was Másilámani; the Devi is called Athulyakusanáyaki. There is a belief that, as di-

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rected by Lord Shivá, the Devi who had the form of a cow took a dip in the sacred temple tank and was rid off the cow form; therefore this holy site is also known as 'Gomukthi' and 'Gokazhi' (salvation of cow). Puránam tell us that Lord Shivá embraced Devi on her attaining her true form. To mark this puránic episode there is an icon in the temple with the sacred name of 'Anaithezhunda Náyanár'(The Lord who rose in embrace). During the festival it is in this form that Lord dispenses holy water.

There are many sacred Pipal trees in the temple. They belonged to creeper variety. Those were the ritually sacred temple trees. This led to the temple being called 'Arasa vanam'(The Pipal Woods). Thirumoolar, a renowned siddha and one of the 'Náyanmárs', performed penance at this site and composed the famous philosophical tract Thirumandiram. His shrine in the temple has the look of a cave.

There is a shrine in honour of a Siddhá by name Thirumáligai Thevar, in one corner of the Mutt. There is an old tradition that this Siddhá(a disciple of the ancient Siddha Bogar and one of the authors of Thiruvisaippá) had at one point made the bull icons in the temple walls spring to life and dispatched them to fight in a war against enemy forces. It is believed that thereafter the temple walls became totally bereft of Nandhis – an unusual feature of temple architecture.

The Rishabam(Bull) icon in the temple is very huge. There is an adage in those parts, 'A spreading Pipal tree, a tall Rishabam'.

The temple was under the jurisdiction of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. The original reputation of the temple was further enhanced by its association with the Ādheenam.

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Festival Splendour:

During the Gurupoojá days there used to be a 'car festival' in this temple. The festival was celebrated in a grand manner for ten days. The sacred ablutions connected with Ratha Sapthami and Gurupoojá used to follow each other; during some years they would occur on the same day. Sri Gomatheesar would be taken on a ritual procession morning and evening every day. During those days the Head of the Mutt would visit his retinue and ensure that the festival went on without any hitch. There was also the dance of Thyagarájamoorthy, known as 'Pandar Kátchi'. The temple festival and the Gurupoojá occurring at the same time was something very special. These events never failed to enrapture everyone, particularly those visiting from other parts. Those steeped in Shiva bhakthi were particularly involved in the temple festival. Those who were disciples of the Ādheenam concentrated on the Gurupoojá festivities. Those with twin devotion lamented that they didn't have many bodies and eyes to savour the darshans simultaneously.

Public Feeding:

The scenes I witnessed since I arrived in Thiruvávaduthurai and the effusive uproar filled me with amazement. I stopped at every point and filled my eyes with all that I saw. How do I locate Pillaivál in this jostling crowd? I scoured every street. My eyes were roving. This scramble till noon hurt my legs. I also felt the pinch of hunger. Deciding to continue the search after lunch I went to the meal centre.

Good Lord! What crowds! What din! What massive feeding! I started wondering if we could manage a place in this throng. Annadánam was continuing from nine in the

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morning. Even when we went there crowds were aplenty. We had to struggle our way to find a place and eat. Thanks to the abundance of food we felt tired even after the meal!

We again started the search for our teacher. Because of the heavy food our search lacked the gusto we had in the morning. We went round, street by street. In between we would ask people, "Where is Pillaivál staying?" The answers were not particularly helpful. "He could be anywhere; could be engaged in discussions with Sannidánam; can be in an assembly of scholars; otherwise could be taking lessons for his disciples. " I felt distressed when I heard that he could be taking lessons for his disciples. 'Instead of being a part of the class why am I roaming around like this?' I lamented. Immediately I would start walking faster.

I see Pillaivál:

At last I set my eyes on my great teacher seated on the thinnai of Namachiváya Mudaliár's house, an official in the Mutt. A few dignitories and Thambiráns were by his side. All of them were conversing joyously. As soon as he saw me Pillaivál made fond enquiries: "When did you return? Have you had your food? How is your health now?" After listening to my reply he said, "You have grown thin. Are you still taking some medicines?" I replied in the negative. Then he affectionately enquired about the welfare of my parents.

"You haven't witnessed Gurupoojá till now, right?"

"No," I replied.

"You can't see the like of it anywhere else. We owe it all to the glory and munificence of the Sannidánam."

"So, can we start our lessons again?"

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"I am eagerly waiting for it."

"After Gurupoojá I would be going to Máyuram. We can restart the lessons there." Before I could express my yearning for the lessons he flagged his interest in teaching.

I stayed on there, observing the ongoing conversation. Many dignitaries called on him and left. Around five in the evening my guru left for the Mutt. I too followed him. Those who came towards us stepped aside respectfully and greeted him. Kumárasámi Thambirán and Paramasiva Thambirán were there. All of us retired to the garden house east of the Mutt tank (the tank has since got silted). They were all discussing matters related to Tamil and the Mutt.

Kási Kalambagam:

"Today is an auspicious day. I am eager to learn one good Tamil text from Ayyá," said Kumárasámi Thambirán.

"Sure, we can" said Pillaivál. The two Thambiráns wanted to study Kási Kalambagam. "It is but appropriate to study Kási Kalambagam in front of Kási Sámi (the Monk of Kási) " the teacher said.

While initially I could not understand the meaning of his remark, I learnt its import on further enquiry. Paramasiva Thambirán had spent a few years in Kási. It was a practice in the Mutt to refer to such persons as 'Kási Sámi'.

I read aloud the *Kási Kalambagam* text. The Gurupoojá festivities were in full swing, with the sounds of musical instruments and the din of joyous celebrations filling the air. But, away from all these we were in a quiet corner in the garden house adjacent to the tank savouring the glory of Kási city, the sacred lore of the Ganges and the benign grace of Sri Vishwanáthá - all through the *Kási Kalambagam* text. This Kalambagam authored by Sri Kumára Gu-

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rupara Swámigal was suffused with felicity of diction and depth of meaning. I had been separated for some time from Pillaivál and Tamil lessons; and now I had a double joy of seeing my guru and studying under him..

The lesson continued till eight in the night. Fifty verses were covered. After the lesson we went to our respective places. Pillaivál went to Chinna Oduvár's house in the south street.

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45. ERUDITION AND AFFECTION

After the night meal on the Gurupoojá day I went to the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt to witness the special events there. Sri Subramania Desikar came in a procession seated in a decorated palanquin. The procession was marked by a throng of his disciples, display of fireworks and the melodious sounds of musical instruments. Many nágaswaram experts were displaying their talents. The decorations on the palanquin were dazzling. During the procession deepárádhaná, the waving of lighted lamps, was performed outside the houses of disciples.

The Audience:

The procession was followed by a ceremonial audience at the Mutt. The Head of the Mutt occupied the seat of honour in the audience hall, and special poojás were offered to him. Desikar was sitting still at the Mandap with substantial floral decors.

The radiance of his presence made it appear as if a beautiful statue was being offered deepárádhaná and poojá. There was a huge crowd in the audience hall. Waves of Thevaram singing and instrumental music filled the air.

After savouring all these sights I went to the house where Pillaivál was staying. My teacher was conversing with his friend Mahálingam Pillai. I could learn from the conversation the various aspects of the Mutt traditions.

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After the strenuous audience was completed, it was Desikar's custom not to take any rest but to bid affectionate farewell to the visitors. Those planning to leave that very night would pay obeisance to Desikar and take his leave. During the Gurupoojá morning Vellálá dignitaries and other visitors would submit their offerings to Desikar and prostrate at his feet.

On the Gurupoojá night the Head of the Mutt would grant gifts to the disciples according to their status. Subramania Desikar used to be very meticulous in this matter and would ensure that there was no delay or hindrance in taking care of the requirements of the visitors. He would give suitable gifts not only to the dignitaries but also to the scholars present. Some visitors would leave only the next morning after some pleasant discussion with Desikar.

Presentation of Poems:

I could glean these matters by listening to the conversation between Pillaivál and Mahálingam Pillai. I had never heard before of benefactors suiting the convenience of the recipients. After learning that Desikar was one such person I felt that Desikar fully deserved the esteem in which he was held. I returned to the audience hall to watch the glory of that sight.

After Mahálingam Pillai left, my teacher permitted himself some rest and reclined on the thinnai. Hardly a minute passed and an elderly gentleman came to call on him. His name was Pasupathi Pandáram. He started recounting some old stories. He claimed that he had tested Pillaivál during his young days. He was in a hurry to return to his village, he said.

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He continued to beat about the bush. Eventually he said that if Pillaivál could compose a verse he would present it to Subramania Desikar as his own composition and manage to get some gift. Without much ado my teacher dictated a verse with great ease. The visitor noted down the verse and left. My teacher again reclined on the thinnai. The very next minute one more visitor appeared, with a similar request.

One visitor or the other trooped in throughout the night, collected verses from Pillaivál, submitted them to Subramania Desikar and collected gift, which was not their legitimate due. I was observing this for some time. Then I dozed off. When I woke up the next morning I realized that my teacher had not had a wink of sleep that night.

The Poet and the Patron:

He completed his morning ritual observances and went to Subramania Desikar. I accompanied him. With no trace of tiredness after nightlong presentation of gifts, Desikar had resumed his penance of benefaction after his morning bath and associated ablutions. On seeing Pillaivál his face brightened with a streak of smile. Pillaivál paid respect to Desikar and sat near him after receiving holy ash.

"It appears that many persons had hassled you last night," Desikar said. My teacher merely replied with a smile.

"When those persons were reciting the verses we were overjoyed. How wonderful the compositions! What felicity of diction! How does it blossom with such ease?" Desikar was effusive.

"All due to the benign grace of Mahá Sannidánam," My teacher replied with humility.

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"We learnt only too well last night the ability of your tireless tongue to sing newer and newer verses."

"Everything shines only by the tireless munificence of Sannidánam."

Is there a limit to the charm of the verse of the poet and the grace of patron? The persons there ascertained the matter with Desikar and froze in wonder.

Motherly Affection:

My teacher left the audience hall and called an official by name Rámayyar. 'Sáminátha Iyer is used to have tiffin in the morning. Please make necessary arrangements." He took me to the agraháram. My teacher had greater concern about my food than about his own. I had felt it on numerous occasions. There was no difference between the love he bestowed on me and a mother's love which cannot bear to see her child hungry. I had felt it from the depth of my heart. When I was speaking about Pillaivál while at Kottoor, I had mentioned that he bestowed more love on me than my mother. Ammá happened to hear the comment. "Sámá, what makes you say this? Can anyone manifest a love greater than a mother's?" It was evident that she was somewhat hurt by my remark. A mother sure has love for a child. But she may not be in a condition to manifest that love in full. My teacher's affection blossomed into actions ever so often. Others might have found those actions minor; but those were of considerable significance to me.

Annapoorani:

Rolling in my mind my teacher's affection, I entered a house in the agraháram as led by Rámayyar. Rámayyar called his younger sister Annapoorani. Some incidents which appear humdrum on many occasions, get etched

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in our mind on some important occasions. My frame of mind then was dominated by my teacher's concern about my food. At that point the name Annapoorani sounded so auspicious and sweet (Annapoorani refers to the Goddess of Beauty and Grace). I felt so happy that Rámayyar had called Goddess Annapoorani Herself to bestow food on me. I had heard of the special significance of Annapoorani shrine in Kási. I had pictured in my mind the majesty of Kási city while studying the Kási Kalambagam text the previous night. I felt as if Annapoorani Devi was serving me food the very next morning. I was elated at the thought that God was providing hints through such incidents, that I would not be in any want.

Lessons:

"Why not we study the remaining portions of the *Kási Kalambagam* text?" My teacher said. A few persons including Kumárasámi Thambirán had also come for the class. That day I studied with greater enthusiasm than on the first day. That Prabandam was completed in the forenoon itself. Then Kumárasámi Thambirán and others submitted a request to Pillaivál: "We have studied a very fine text during these two days. If Ayyá could be gracious enough to stay on here and teach us, we can study many more works. We would also be spending our time in a meaningful manner."

The teacher promised to return in a few days after a visit to Máyuram and fulfil their request. Having savoured the sites of Thiruvávaduthurai and enjoyed the affection of people there, I too felt that it would be nice if Pillaivál could return to Thiruvávaduthurai and take lessons for us.

Chola Mandala Sathakam:

That afternoon a landlord from Thirumalairáyan Pattinam had come to see the teacher and handed over to him

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a palm-leaf copy of *Chola Mandala Sathakam* text. My teacher handed it over to me and asked me to read from the text. I always had great interest in reading new texts. So I started reading it enthusiastically. Master was explaining some aspects of the text as I kept reading.

As soon as I heard the name *Chola Mandala Sathakam*, the other *Sathakams* I had studied came to my mind. Normally these Sathakams contained hundred verses which are essentially didactic in nature. This Sathakam, however, was different. I asked my teacher if Sathakams are not voluminous texts. He explained in some detail the difference between moralistic Sathakams and Maṇḍala Sathakams.

He explained that there was a tradition to outline the glory of a particular region, its kings, its savants and its benefactors; and to assemble such verses in a single volume. Chola Mandala Sathakam was one such text. Āthmanátha Desikar was its author. There was one more Sathakam authored by Padikkásu Pulavar which outlines the glory of the Thondai region and known as *Thondai Mandala Sathakam*.

Taking Leave:

In a few hours I completed reading the entire text of Chola Mandala Sathakam. I could not understand some of the old historical details mentioned in the text.

Then Pillaivál asked me if I could accompany him to Máyuram.

"No, Ayyá. My books and clothing are in my village. I have come only to see Ayyá and to ascertain when I could come away from the village. I'll go there and return very soon."

"No great hurry. You better go to your village, spend a few days there and then come. By then I would have also

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returned to Máyuram. You could come there straight."

The next morning I took leave of Master and went to Sooryamoolai. I informed my father and others about the splendour of Gurupoojá and the warmth of my teacher's affection. It left them happy and satisfied.

I spent about ten days at Sooryamoolai and went over the old lessons. Then I went to Máyuram with my father. Pillaivál was already there. My father stayed at Máyuram for a day and then returned to Sooryamoolai.

Events at Máyuram:

When I reached Máyuram I found that Pillaivál had started taking lessons on the Prabanthams of Sri Sivaprakása Swámigal, to Saverinátha Pillai and a few others. A few Prabandams such as *Nánmani Málai* had already been completed. At that point the lesson on *Bikshádana Navamani Málai* text was in progress and I joined in. During the intervals I studied the Prabandams already covered in the earlier classes. In the meanwhile, at the invitation of a friend from Káraikkál my teacher went there and also visited Thiruvárur and Thiruchirápalli. Saverinátha Pillai was with me in Máyuram.

As I was not in a position to pay the amount to the boarding place in Máyuram, I did not go there for my meals. I got rice and other provisions and started cooking myself. A letter from Pillaivál to Saverinátha Pillai made it clear that even during his journeys outside Máyuram he was still thinking of my welfare. In a letter from Thiruchiráppalli he had specially requested Saverinátha Pillai to take good care of me.

Master returned to Máyuram after a few days. He was very sad to know that I had to be cooking my own food. Im-

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mediately he gave me three rupees. "Please go and give it to that boarding house and have your meal there," he advised me. My earlier food arrangement was resumed.

Ambar Puránam:

One day Master asked me to bring a palm manuscript bundle from his bookshelf. It was the uncompleted text of *Ambar Puránam* which he had started to compose but did not have the time to complete. It dealt with Thiruvambar, a Saivite holy site sanctified by Theváram. He asked me to read the text from the beginning. I read it slowly and with deliberation. He suggested some changes off and on and I recorded them in the palm manuscript. In two or three days I completed reading the text, duly incorporating the corrections required by Ayyá.

"It is a year since I commenced composing this text but there have been frequent interruptions. I dictated this to someone else, to have it written down. He was not good on the job. Without listening to my dictation properly he had made several mistakes. I had a suspicion in this regard, and that's why I asked you to read it again. It is not easy to get someone to write down properly what I dictate." Having said this he asked me, "Now it should be possible to complete this Puránam fairly soon. Would it be convenient for you to write it down on palm leaf as I dictate?"

"Your wish is a command," I replied.

"I had promised to return to Thiruvávaduthurai. The Thambiráns there are eager to listen to my lessons. You may as well complete this text after you move there." I was elated that the journey to Thiruvávaduthurai was round the corner.

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46. A DOUBLE GAIN

As I had expected the Thiruvàvaduthurai journey occurred soon. Within a week of my arrival at Màyuram Pillaivàl set out to Thiruvàvaduthurai. Saverinàtha Pillai and I accompanied him. All we took with us were a few palm leaf manuscripts and the dress required for our use.

Crossing the Màyuram boundary the carriage was moving along. As directed by my teacher I took out Ambar Purànà palm leaf text and opened it. "Pick up the stylus," he said. 'Haven't I read out the entire text and incorporated the corrections proposed by Master?' I thought.

Flood of Poetry:

He asked me to read out the last verse written in the manuscript. Then he was lost in thought for a brief while. Then he started dictating the stanzas. 'What a wonder! We are travelling in a carriage. In such a setting can one's mind take to its wings? Can imagination be propelled? Can poetry be composed? Even so is it at all possible to compose more than four or five verses?' I was set to think on these lines.

As if reciting verses already committed to memory, he was dictating verse after verse in an uninterrupted flow. The bullock cart was moving slowly. The flow of verses from

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him had the elegance of a moving river. My hand was driving the stylus. In the shakes of the carriage the lines were zigzagging and the words were dancing. But his verses were precise and charged with meaning.

The myth had it that a king from the northern parts by name Nandan had worshipped in Thiruvambar and gained salvation. Instead of briefly stating that he had visited the holy site, the poet - my Master – took the opportunity to describe how the king had worshipped at the different holy sites en route and highlighted the greatness of those sites. He had known many interesting pieces of information about those holy Saivite sites. It was his desire to underline this aspect whenever opportunity arose. Therefore he started describing in detail how King Nandan had enjoyed having darshan at many holy sites.

This section in the text was called 'Sites of Nandan Worship'. The manuscript already had 33 verses. The verses delineating Nandan's journey were composed during our own journey to Thiruvàvaduthurai, during that shaky carriage ride. Even earlier I used to occasionally write down verses as dictated by my teacher. I used to marvel at his poetic prowess. But the wonderment that overtook me during that journey was unparalleled. I had found only in semi-fictional stories of a continuous narration of history in the form of verses. It is said that Kambar composed 700 verses on a single day. 'Is it at all possible to compose poetry at such a fast pace? It must be mere fiction. Or, Kambar must have been divinely inspired,' I had thought. But I experienced something amazing that day - the speed at which my Master composed verses and the sheer flow of majestic poetry from him. Based on this personal experience I started believing that the old story about Kambar must indeed have been true.

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We forgot that we were travelling in a carriage. He was journeying forth in his magical realm. He dropped verses one by one from that heady height. I wrote them down. I could see only his form and the verses which flowed from him. When he stopped for a moment after dictating a verse I used to stand outside that sphere and look at the whole thing in astonishment. But the very next moment another verse would issue forth from him. Again I would get absorbed in the experience.

Reaching Thiruvàvaduthurai:

Only when the cartman announced that we had reached Thiruvàvaduthurai could we tear ourselves away from Nandan and his journey and lift our heads. "Ok, you can tie up the palm-leaves. We'll deal with it later," Master directed. If only I were not in the grip of wonderment and I had the ability to verbalize my admiration, I would well have composed an epic singing his glory and pouring out the emotional surge in my heart. But I had no claims to such poetic prowess!

We alighted at the house of Chinna Oduvàr on the South Street of Thiruvàvaduthurai. After completing his ritual observances, my teacher set out to have a darshan of Sri Subramania Desikar. I followed him like his shadow. By then the news of our arrival had already reached the Thambiràns' ears. They were waiting at the doorstep of the Mutt to receive Pillaivàl. As soon as we reached the Mutt they took him straightaway to the Ādheenam.

Welcome:

Subramania Desikar's happiness was evident on his face. My teacher paid respect to Desikar and sat by his side. I stood behind him. The Thambiràns were also there. "Here-

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after the Thambiràns will be delighted. We are also happy," said Desikar and asked "When shall we start the lessons?'

"I am waiting for Sannidànam's order. Can start even today," replied Pillaivàl.

"You've come just now. You must be tired. The lessons can be started from tomorrow morning," said Desikar and they were discussing several other matters. Then we took leave of him and retired to our place of stay.

Planning of Lessons:

The next morning we went to the Mutt and sat in front of Subramania Desikar. The Thambiràns were all ready for the lessons. Kumàrasàmi Thambiràn was seated in the front as the leader of the group. It was evident that they were eagerly waiting to hear lessons from Pillaivàl. 'How enthusiastic are these people to learn Tamil! They have no worries; no pecuniary gains from learning Tamil. And people make much of my love for Tamil!' I felt truly humbled in front of them.

When question arose regarding the text to be taken up for study, Subramania Desikar said, "There is perhaps no need for everyone to study the same text. Kumàrasàmi Thambiràn had already studied certain texts. There can be a separate lesson-routine for him, and another for the rest. Kumàrasàmi Thambiràn can start with *Thiruvànaikkà Purànam*; the others can study *Seekàlathi Purànam*." He also discussed a few other matters regarding the lesson.

My Sadness:

When discussions were going on about the Thambiràns and the lessons for them I felt somewhat sad. 'They appeared to have nearly forgotten me. Am I forbidden from joining the classes meant for Thambiràns? Does it violate

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the norms of the Mutt? Would my lessons be restricted to what Pillaivål teaches me at his residence? If so what is the benefit in my having come here?' My mind was seized with these worries. I was lost in thought with a withered face.

My Desire:

At that point Pillaivål's eyes landed on me. It appeared as if he had gauged my feelings. As if he had divined the feelings of both of us Subramania Desikar raised the question, "To which group do we assign him?" That question was a shot in the arm for me. It shook me from my reverie. In my enthusiasm I interjected even before Pillaivål could answer. "I would like to join both the groups," I said.

No one demurred. My teacher and Desikar blessed my enthusiasm with a gentle smile.

Desikar told me genially, "Everyone dreams of one profit. And twofold profit for you." On hearing his words, the deep anguish I had felt a little while ago disappeared without a trace. I was in cloud nine.

"Do you have the necessary books?" That patron asked me.

Is there any bar to my confessing to him that I had no books? As soon as I replied him, that benefactor par excellence had the Thiruvånaikkå Purånam and Seekålathi Purånam brought from the Mutt library and handed them over to me.

Desikar also directed, "During the lessons let Sáminátha Iyer read the texts." He had already known that I would set to music every verse that I read aloud.

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Lessons Begin:

Thiruvånaikkå Purånam was taken up first. I read out the invocation verses in the text dedicated to Lord Vinåyakar. The Master gave out the meaning. Then I also read out the invocation verse related to Seekålathi Purånam.

So, on that auspicious day, my Master commenced the lessons for the Thambiråns as per Subramania Desikar's wish. Thiruvånaikkå Purånam was taken up during the mornings in the presence of Desikar. In the afternoons Seekålathi Purånam was taken up in some other part of the Mutt. I attended both the sessions.

The Method of Teaching:

During the lessons conducted in the presence of Subramania Desikar, he used to compliment me on my musical rendition of the verses. As Thiruvånaikkå Purånam was a difficult text, not more than fifty verses were covered in a day. Subramania Desikar would also express his ideas in appropriate places. Many dignitaries and scholars frequently visited during the mornings to have the darshan of Desikar. Even then the lessons continued. The visitors also would enjoy the sessions. On such occasions the lessons would become more interesting. Pillaiv˙l would cite many parallels for the benefit of the visitors. When verses with Saiva Sidhåntha concepts come up, Desikar would cite parallels from Meikanda Shåstrås and explain the related concepts with great lucidity. On such occasions time nearly froze. Tamil feast might be a polite form of expression. But, what I experienced there was well and truly the pleasure of savouring a grand feast. Any thought of food was banished from my mind.

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During the lessons I used to read out each verse three times. Before the teacher explained the meaning I would read the entire verse once. While the meaning was being spelt out I would again read the verse in small sections. After the explanation of meaning was completed I would read the entire verse once again. Thanks to this practice the text got etched in my mind. This was the teaching method adopted by Pillaivål.

I had my meals in the morning, at noon, and during night at the choultry attached to the Mutt.

I derived newer and newer happiness everyday by the study of Tamil texts, the benign words of Subramania Desikar and the exposure to the dignitaries and scholars from other places. The Thambiråns moved with me with a lot of affection. While there were differences between them and me, we moved with each other as comrades in pursuit of knowledge, as young saplings sheltered under the benevolent tree that was our Master. The affection lavished on me by Kumårasåmi Thambirån was indeed special. We were all bound together by the allure of Tamil.

Saverinåtha Pillai spent a week with us in Thiruvåvaduthurai and then left for Måyuram with our Master's permission. As he had known Munsiff Vedanå yakam Pillai of Måyuram, he stayed with him there.

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47. THREE PARAGONS OF AFFECTION

The two kinds of lessons went on regularly during the mornings and in the evenings at Thiruvåvaduthurai Mutt. Desikar's affection for me was growing by the day. Knowing Pillaivål's abundant affection for me, Desikar lavished gracious concern on me. Their affection for me helped me win others' warm feelings. The people of the Mutt started treating me as one among them. The officials of the Mutt spoke to me with warmth and also extended all possible help to me. I resolved to move with them carefully and modestly to ensure that their affection towards me should be sustained.

The Command of The Holiness:

During the Måsi month Mahå Shivaråthri arrived. If anyone in Thiruvåvaduthurai wanted some article for personal or family use he could get it only from the storeroom of the Mutt. Those days there were no shops in that place. As it was Shivaråthri day I wanted to go to the Gomatheeshwarar temple and offer worship in the evening. Coconut, banåna, betel leaves and areca nuts were required for the worship. I thought I would get them from the Mutt storehouse, went there after the morning lesson, stood outside the storeroom and stated my requirement to the storekeeper: a voice rang out from somewhere. "It is Sannidånam's order that whenever and whatever Iyer wants he should be given immedi-

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ately." I turned round to see where the invisible voice came from. One Kandasámi Oduvár was coming towards us, as the source of the voice. I suddenly noticed that Sannidánam himself was seated across a window in the storeroom. I felt embarrassed. The Oduvár repeated, "The command is that he could get whatever he wants."Desikar graciously smiled in endorsement. I got whatever I wanted. The storekeeper who had been helpful to me, ensured thereafter that I got whatever I wanted, at a mere hint.

The *Thiruvánaikká Puránam* text was completed in the morning. Thereafter *Thirunágai Károna Puránam* was commenced. As I had already studied these texts while at Patteeswaram, I could read the texts very clearly. Off and on Subramania Desikar advised me the rágás to be used while reading different verses. I did so accordingly.

Oduvár's Affection:

One morning I was coming out of the Mutt and was proceeding towards the place where I had my meals. It was past eleven. The administrator of the Mutt kitchen, one Muthusámi Oduvár was coming from the opposite direction. His affectionate and polite ways would always make me want to share a few words with him. "You are coming from the east. Any work in the agraháram?" I asked him.

"I am coming back after seeing Ayyá and Ammá ."

"Isn't your house on the North Street? How come your mother and father have come here?"

"No. Annà's Ayyá and Ammá have come," he replied. "What? When did they come? Where are they?" I was all excitement. My eagerness to see Ammá and Appá was evident.

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Though Oduvår was senior to me in years, he always addressed me as Annå (elder brother) as a mark of politeness and respect. My parents had not informed me earlier that they were coming that day. I did not expect them either. 'Where are they staying? This is an unknown place. It is already meal time. And Appå has to perform his poojå also.' I was bothered by these thoughts. Possibly guessing my concerns from the look on my face, Oduvår told me reassuringly: "No need to worry. They came in the morning itself. When they enquired about Annå I realized straightaway who they are. I arranged for a proper place in the choultry for them and also sent them the necessary things for their use. I have also sent milk and other materials for Ayyå 's poojå . They have already completed their poojå and are waiting for Annå 's arrival. All you have to do is to join them for the meal. I have just now checked up all these details."

I was grateful and surprised at all that has been done even without my knowledge. I was lost in admiration over Oduvår's concern and competence and also the efficiency of the Mutt organization. I rushed to see my parents.

Parents' Happiness:

As soon as I reached there, my father was effusive in praise: "What fine people! What efficient arrangements! What hospitality!" It was now my mother's turn: "Såmå , I have never seen a place like this. We came this morning just to see you and find out how you are getting on. Some persons suggested that we could stay in the choultry. We then came here. We happened to meet a person here. He enquired as to who we were. I told him that we have come to see you. Immediately he extended all the help we wanted. I haven't seen the like of him before. Who is that person?"

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'He is like a brother to me' I told myself. I knew fully well what an affectionate person Oduvår was. After all, my parents had not known his wonderful nature.

"See your little baby brother," Ammå handed over the baby to me. I gladly took the baby and gave him an affectionate hug.

It was a long time since I enjoyed my mother's cooking, further sanctified during my father's poojå . I really got stuck into it. They were also very pleased that I was in such a truly good place.

Rågamålikå:

For some reason the morning lesson that day was shifted to the afternoon from three to seven and was held in the rose water pavilion at the Mutt. It used to happen on a few days. Subramania Desikar was also present during the lesson. As directed by Pillaivål, I was reading the Thirunågai Kårona Purånam. The pleasure of having met my parents and the energy I derived from my mother's food gave me a new enthusiasm. So when I read the verses that day I used different rågås for each of the verses. As a connoisseur of music, Desikar was closely observing each of the rågås. He turned to Pillaivål and said, "It is a pleasure to hear your disciple reading the verses in rågamålikå (a song where different units are set to different rågås.)

When such lessons are on, it was usual for some persons to hide themselves in a place north of the hall and to listen to the lessons so that they didn't cause any disturbance. My father had come that side after completing his evening ritual observances. Noticing that some persons were watching over our class from a distance, he too joined them and listened to my reading the text and Pillaivål explaining the meaning. I had not noticed it.

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He was also delighted that I was reading the verses musically. He also happened to hear Subramania Desikar complimenting me. His happiness and satisfaction knew no bounds. It appeared as if the whole thing had been set up in advance. My father landing there by chance, my reading the verses in *ràgamàlikà* and Desikar praising me and expressing his affection towards me – all this dispelled all concerns that my father had about me; he felt reassured that I was in good hands and in the right place. We dispersed after the completion of the lesson.

I walked a few steps ahead. Pillaivàl and Thambiràn were following at some distance. I saw my father. "My dear boy! I heard your reading the verses. I also noticed Sannidànam's appreciative words. All God's grace!" He said this with emotion surging in his heart; beyond that words failed him. He went to his choultry. I told him that I would join him later.

My Parents and My Teacher:

It was my practice to accompany my teacher every evening to Kottumàngulam in Thiruvàvaduthurai and return after completing the ritual observances of the evening. After it gets dark I would lead my teacher by the hand and return. While returning that evening, he said, "You told me that your parents have come. Where are they staying? I would like to see them now."

"Don't take the trouble, Ayyà. They would themselves be coming to call on you", I told him. But he wouldn't listen. At his insistence I took him to my parents.

Pillaivàl sat on a bench in the choultry. father too sat with him. When my guru was enquiring about my father's welfare, my mother came there. She had not seen my teacher before.

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"You have been protecting my child as a father and mother. We are of no use to him. He should come up in life only with your affection and support." She said these words with moist eyes. Her tone appeared like seeking a boon from god.

"You need not worry about him at all. He is studying well. With god's grace he would sure come up in life." These words were so soothing to my mother. No one equalled my parents and my guru in lavishing love on me. It was evident when they were discussing about my welfare and future. The love of these three people had three different qualities. Can one compare and grade such great love? My heart is full even today when I recall that scene surcharged with love and affection. I still cherish them as a Trinity of Love.

The next morning my parents left for Sooryamoolai after telling me, "We have come only to see you. We are very happy and satisfied. Now we'll get along. Take good care of your health."

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48. A FEW DIFFICULTIES

It is not possible for anyone to be continuing to enjoy the same level of happiness for ever and ever. Joy and pain do alternate in man's life. Whether rolling in wealth or wallowing in poverty, people experience joy and sorrow alternately. People are not blessed to enjoy pleasure all the time or condemned to eternal sorrow.

In Thiruvàvaduthurai I had access to good facilities and fine Tamil education. The environment there supported uninterrupted joy and satisfaction; but not without occasional hiccups.

Unsuitable food:

As I was reading the verses in two sets of lessons, on some days my throat and tongue tended to get sore. In the choultry where I had my meals I was but one of the many. Naturally enough there was no one there to prepare anything special to take care of my problem. I was also afraid to seek any such special treatment. An old woman was cooking and serving food at the choultry . There was no dearth in the supply of food materials from the Mutt. But the old woman did not have the energy or inclination to cook tasty and wholesome food. The higher-ups thought that everything was proceeding well. 'In such a big place why are some people so indifferent?' I lamented.

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As the choultry food did not suit me, I sometimes ate plain rice mixed with buttermilk. Some of the dignitaries and scholars coming to Thiruvàvaduthurai from other places would sometimes bring their own cooks. Occasionally they also landed there with their families. As they knew that I was in the good books of the Head of the Mutt, when they knew about my predicament they would insist on my joining them for food. That would please me no end.

Kuzhambu triggers trouble:

One day I was suffering from loose bowels. I had known of one remedy - eating rice mixed with kuzhambu made with mango-stone. I suavely sold the idea to the old woman. She too agreed. When I settled down for my meal, she poured the *kuzhambu* on my plantain leaf. This was noticed by a person eating with me. He was learning Sanskrit in Thiruvàlankàdu. He could not stomach this special dispensation to me. That feeling assumed proportions. He made sure that the matter was carefully dressed up and reached Subramanya Desikar's ears as if a grave misdemeanour was occurring at the choultry. Immediately a directive reached the old woman from the Mutt: "When many people are eating together it is not proper to provide special treatment to one individual. It is hereby ordered that such practice should stop." An official issued the strict directive to the woman.

This incident left me sad. 'The Sannidànam could have ascertained the matter with me. Listening to someone, he has taken such a step'. I felt sad, but at the same time I assuaged my feelings: 'The Sannidànam could not take such a harsh step. Someone could have told him that I was being feted specially. He could have issued the directive on the basis that there should not be partiality of treatment in

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a common place. What was the special treatment? Only a measly mango-stone kuzhambu. That too because of my indisposition. Sannidànam has special affection for me, and if he had known the full facts he wouldn't have issued such a directive.'

Unexpected Incident:

After my night meals I used to go to the Mutt and spend time with Kumàrasàmi Thambirán and discuss the lessons we had learnt that day. Then I would lie down there and sleep. This practice had continued for a few months after I landed in Thiruvàvaduthurai. One night I was reading my lessons with him as usual. On the eastern side of the Mutt there were two rooms in the garden house for the use of Thambiráns. Kumàrasàmi Thambirán was staying in one of these rooms. Pannirukai Thambirán was occupying the other room. He was an influential person; had occupied responsible positions in the Mutt. We used to discuss about the texts we had studied, in the yard between the two rooms, when he would also be present. As I was tired and sleepy I lay down there and slept. It was around ten. Kumàrasàmi Thambirán and Pannirukai Thambirán were chatting. Muthusàmi Oduvàr came there.

It was a standard practice that a portion of the prasàdham offered at the Mutt and at the temple as a part of late night worship would be sent to Subramania Desikar. He would partake of a small portion and parcel out the remaining and send them to the Thambiráns. Around ten at night the Thambiráns would get *Vadà, Sugian and Thenkuzhal*. Muthusàmi Oduvàr had then come with Kumàrasàmi Thambirán's and Pannirukai Thambirán's share of the goodies. When he came there the two were discussing about a theft that had taken place in the Mutt that evening.

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Pannirukai Thambirán was wearing a special kandi, jewel made of Rudhráksham bead of a rare variety, mounted with golden clasps at each end set with precious stones. It was worth some two thousand rupees. That evening Thambirán had visited the room next to the bathing ghat and returned to take care of some chores. After a while he realized that the kandi jewel was missing. As it was a very expensive piece, the Mutt officials started searching for it.

"We must enquire with the cooks and attendants. Is it not a blot on the Mutt's reputation?" said Pannirukai Thambirán.

"We must call every mother's son and enquire intensively. A thief would not easily admit his crime. We must give them some sound thrashing," said Kumárasámi Thambirán.

On finding out the matter they discussed, Muthusámi Oduvár also joined and said, "On knowing this, Sannidánam also is worried. Who would have committed this so brazenly? Everyone is enquiring all over the Mutt."

This discussion disturbed my sleep. Without opening my eyes I kept lying down hoping to catch the sleep back. At that point a new person who joined the conversation chipped in: "We must also enquire the new entrants to the Mutt."

Kumárasámi Thambirán said, "Who are the new persons? All are old bandicoots. This must be an insider's job."

"Can't say that. Is not this Iyer a new arrival? Why count him out?" the third person continued.

On hearing this remark I started trembling. My disturbed sleep vanished in a trice.

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'Ayyo! I am totally innocent and they are suspecting me. Have I been moving with them only to earn the title of a thief? Why have I at all come to this place!' My mind was in a whirl.

Pannirukai Thambirån got angry and told that person, "What the hell did you say, you devil? Don't repeat those words again."

Kumårasåmi Thambirån flew into a fury and told that person sharply, "Who asked your opinion on this matter? You have no sense of the innate quality and nature of persons, and you have dared open your mouth. Just get lost."

Oduvår also had his share of rebuke. "Listen. If you say anything against Iyer your tongue will rot. How did you have the heart to be so cruel and inconsiderate." The person rose and left without a word.

Words of Solicitude:

I heard these words. I felt relieved. I turned towards them and told them with folded hands, "I have been hearing the conversation about me. Initially I was deeply disturbed and you have removed that thorn. I can't tell you how perturbed I was. I am now at peace with myself. You have indeed saved me from a terrible slander." Even while I was speaking to them I was shaking in fear. Noting this Pannirukai Thambirån consoled me with soothing words: "Why are you getting worried? Are we so naïve as to believe any and every story? We will make sure that you will come to no harm at any time. You should dismiss that fellow's words as stupid remarks. Simply forget it." "I would never ever forget these kind words," I told them.

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Kandi Found:

The missing kandi was a staple of conversation all over the Mutt. Around ten next morning Pannirukai Thambirán was speaking to some persons in one corner of the Mutt. Suddenly an attendant ran towards him from a room near the bathing ghat, handed over the kandi and told him, "Sámi, I was sweeping different parts of the Mutt this morning. I found something dazzling behind the Vináyaká icon in a niche in a wall near the bathing ghat. I looked closely and found this kandi."

Pannirukai Thambirán was filled with happiness on receiving the kandi and told those around: "Yesterday when I went to the bathing ghat for my ritual observances I had left the kandi there and went to the garden. At that point a guard came rushing to me and said that there was an urgent summon from Sannidánam. I thought it must be something important, forgot everything else and scampered to Sannidánam's presence. He gave me some directions on an important matter. For some time my mind was seized of that matter. I completely forgot about the Kandi. I remembered it only after some time. I couldn't recall where I had left it. I searched for it in all the other places. I made others also join the search. It was not to be found. Somehow the matter reached Sannidánam's ears too. With growing years, loss of memory raises its head. I have caused unnecessary worry to many persons. Alas! Sáminátha Iyer has also been made to undergo considerable torment." He also thoughtfully sent word to me about the recovery of kandi. As soon as I heard this I went to the Vináyaká shrine and worshipfully thanked Him.

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Distress due to Talebearing:

On another occasion a person carried tales against me to my teacher. Pillaivål got angry with me. Whenever he was angry at someone he would stop speaking to him. He did so in my case too. As usual I continued my reading verses during the lessons at the Mutt and writing down verses in the palm-leaves whenever my teacher so directed. When I was sitting near him he did not specifically ask me to pick up the palm leaf and write. Reclining on the bed he would commence the first line of a verse. If it was a new verse I took the hint that he wanted me to write down the verse, would pick up the palm leaf and stylus and start writing. He would go on and on. If he wanted to stop he would give a hint and then I would stop.

The continuation of this silent stand-off bothered me a great deal. I did not inform anyone else about this. I simply smouldered within myself.

At that point the Spring Festival was being celebrated in Måyuram. Subramanya Desikar went to Måyuram with his retinue for darshan during the festival. My teacher also went along with him. A few students and I accompanied him. We reached Måyuram by evening. On completion of darshan at Sri Måyuranåthar temple, Subramanya Desikar returned to the Mutt with his retinue. He sent me with a Mutt official, directing him to arrange for my food. Pillaivål didn't know about this. He was staying in his house.

After food I went to Pillaivål's house and sat on the thinnai. Pillaivål had gone to the Mutt as it was the time for common food service.

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A Surprise:

It was Subramanya Desikar's custom to join the others during the common food service at the Mutt. During this common food service, the Thambiráns and the other lay Saivite devotees occupied separate rows. In the row of lay devotees the pride of place belonged to Pillaivál.

When Pillaivál sat in this seat of honour, the usual clarity and brightness were conspicuously absent on his face; there was some trace of worry. He suddenly rose from his seat. It was not considered the right thing to do. Pillaivál was known to be very familiar with the norms of propriety at the Mutt. So, everyone around was startled at this. Subramanya Desikar guessed that something was bothering Pillaivál and sent a person to enquire about the matter. Pillaivál said, "Sáminátha Iyer was coming with me. I have come here without making proper arrangements for his food. I am worried that he may be starving. I'm trying to find out what arrangement has been made." Hearing this Desikar remarked, "We have sent an official to take him for his food. He would have had his meal by now."

Can Love ever be confined?

Pillaivál felt relieved. Still he was not totally at peace with himself. His mind was not on eating. He made a pretense of eating, rose before anyone else did and went to his house which was adjacent to the Mutt without even washing his hands. On finding him approaching the house speedily, I rose from my perch on the thinnai.

As there was no lamp near the thinnai he came close to me, looked intently at my face and asked, "Is this Sáminátha Iyer? Have you had your meal?" Only after I answered in the affirmative did his mind rest contented. He went inside

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the house to wash his hand and directed his attendant to bring a lamp and place it near the thinnai.

Then he started speaking to me affectionately. His coming fast towards the house, his peering into my face and his speaking to me affectionately after a few days of studied reserve - all these unfolded like a dream in my mind.

After a while a few persons came from the Mutt and told me, "We realized the depth of Ayyâ's affection towards you. You are indeed fortunate." They also narrated what happened at the Mutt dining hall. It appeared as if my great mentor was himself making amends for a few days of indifference towards me.

How long can love and affection stay confined and dammed? One day love so confined would sure break its confines and get released with redoubled force. Such an occurrence has a beauty of its own.

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49. THE SHRINE OF THE GODDESS OF LEARNING

On completion of the Spring Festival at Máyuram, Subramanya Desikar returned to Thiruvávaduthurai with his retinue. Piilaivál and I also accompanied him. Lessons continued as usual at the Mutt.

Desikar's Routine:

Subramania Desikar usually had a busy schedule from morning till night: taking classes; discussions with scholars; and dealing with the problems of the disciples visiting the Mutt and extending to them all necessary help.

The Bath:

He got up early in the morning. Sometimes a senior Thambirán came and woke him up. Around five in the morning he would go to Káveri for bath. He would walk the distance of half a mile. Thambiráns and attendants would accompany him carrying Desikar's seat plank and the box of ritually pure clothes. When he returned to the Mutt after the bath in Káveri, Brahmins and Saivites accompanied him discussing spiritual matters, after the completion of their morning rites. The road to Káveri was lined on both sides with massive Marudam trees. Some persons used to wait on the banks of Káveri mainly to join Desikar during his return to Mutt after his bath, and to have an occasion to share a few words with him.

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Worship at the Temple:

There was a place called Samádhi Thoppu or Burial Grove en route. The burial shrines of many past Heads of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt are located in that grove. At a short distance before the grove and along the road is the burial shrine of a great saint by name Maraignána Desikar. Subramania Desikar invariably stopped at that point and paid obeisance at that shrine. Then would follow a darshan at the Shivá temple. At that point a few fresh coconuts would be smashed as an offering at the shrine of '*Thunai Vanda Vináyakar*'(Vináyaká of Divine Succour), located near the eastern entrance of the temple.

In the Mutt itself, he would first pay obeisance to Thirumáligai Thevar and then offer worship at the shrine of Sri Namachiváyamoorthy. The Oduvárs would ritually chant ten stanzas from *Sri Panchákshara Desika Málai*, a Prabandam dedicated to Sri Namachiváyamoorthy. At the conclusion of each stanza, Desikar would ceremonially prostrate. After ten such prostrations he would distribute holy ash to the disciples. Thereafter he would move to the private audience hall and ascend his seat of honour. While Desikar had woken up before five in the morning, it would be about eight by the time he reaches the audience hall.

Soon enough Thambiráns and other disciples at the Mutt would pay respect to Desikar and collect holy ash from him. Then Desikar would enquire if any mendicants were waiting at the gate.

Charity:

Persons desirous of obtaining financial assistance from Desikar would meet him in the morning itself and accomplish their objectives. The first concern of Desikar on as-

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cending his seat was to check up if any mendicants were waiting. If no one was around he would feel disappointed.

He would not take any food during the mornings. He would start taking lessons on Saiva Siddhántha Shástrás. Some Thambiráns would attend the lessons.

Rewards Linked to Merit:

When scholars with erudition in shástrás came to the Mutt, Desikar evinced a lot of interest in knowing their areas of expertise and in discussing the subject with them. Whenever any scholar came to the Mutt, the attendants lost no time in informing Desikar.

A sentry was usually posted at the entrance to the audience hall. Those days an old man by name Muththaiyan worked as a sentry. Having served Desikar for a long time he was familiar with his ways. When any scholar came to the Mutt he would speak to them respectfully and also ascertain his area of competence. He would then request him to remain seated, go inside and inform the Sannidánam that a Brahmin had come.

"What is his expertize?" Desikar would enquire.

Muththaiyan would reply appropriately _ "He is a logician", or "Well versed in *Meemámsá*."

The scholar would immediately get permission to enter the audience hall; would be involved in discussions with Desikar. The more he discussed the more he realized that he was in the presence of a connoisseur. Desikar would also be happy on learning the scholar's competence. Simultaneously Desikar would also evaluate the merit of the scholar, and would reward him appropriately. The scholar would also gladly and gratefully accept the reward based on a nuanced appreciation of his merit.

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"Please stay here for some days. You should also visit us often," Desikar would tell him. It was not merely a polite remark; but was based on genuine appreciation. The scholar would tend to feel that it would indeed be a loss if he did not come to such a place of eminence. And he would soon become a part of the scholarly staff of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt.

Such scholars not only received encouragement and monetary gain; their scholarship would also improve with Desikar's support. If an expert in one branch of learning came to the Mutt once, Desikar would reward him suitably and also give a clear hint that the scholar would get higher rewards if he honed his skill further. The scholar also would ensure an improvement in his knowledge by the time of his next visit. This would result in increased happiness and monetary gain.

Many scholars getting gifts from many other Courts derived special satisfaction in meeting Desikar, engaging in discussions with him and in receiving rewards. The gifts from Desikar would not exceed fifteen rupees. Minimum reward would be a mere half a rupee. Even so, the scholars came to him not with only this reward in view. Their main attraction was the discernment of Desikar in identifying the excellence of scholarship and words of appreciation aligned to the recipients' talents.

The visiting vidwáns would sometimes be engaged in an exposition of verses. They would recite the slokás and verses composed in Desikar's praise and also offer extensive comments on them. They would also explain in detail the conceptual elements in the verses. Desikar would also raise some questions in between. The scholar would also identify Desikar's sensitivity and perceptiveness as re-

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flected in his questions and be very pleased. Desikar would spend his time fruitfully in the pursuit of knowledge and piety.

Management of the Mutt:

Desikar had appointed competent persons to administer the affairs of the Mutt. Many Thambiráns were entrusted with the responsibilities of superintendents, assistant superintendents and treasurers. There were also storekeepers and writers. Desikar did not believe in micromanaging the affairs of the Mutt and causing confusion and lack of confidence in the officials. He would, however, give specific directives in respect of important and special matters. The officials would do his bidding with great care and devotion. This style of enlightened management ensured the smooth functioning of the Mutt. It was therefore possible for him not to get weighed down by administrative minutiae, but to play the role of a connoisseur among scholars and a generous patron of supplicants.

Pilgrims:

After completing the poojá rituals by eleven o' clock, Desikar would join his disciples at lunch by twelve o' clock. Then he would rest for a while. Thereafter he would be engaged in teaching disciples, interacting with students and discussing with scholars. He would go to Shivá temple during the second evening poojá. Some thirty / forty persons - including Thambiráns and others - would accompany him. Oduvárs would also go with them chanting Theváram hymns. While returning to the Mutt after temple darshan, he would pause near the temple Nandhi and look for the presence of pilgrims. He would send the Brahmin pilgrims to the choultry for food. If there were many pilgrims, he would direct that a cook be sent to the choultry to assist the old

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woman cook there. He would also have temple prasádam distributed to them. Arrangements would be made to feed others at the Mutt. In special cases milk and banana were given from the Mutt.

Sanskrit Students:

Many Sanskrit scholars lived in nearby villages such as Thiruválankádu and Thirukodigá. They received regular annuity from the Mutt. They were all scholars of the Mutt. Many students would flock there to learn Shástrá lessons from these scholars. I had moved with many such students from Thirunelveli, Madurai and Salem. Some of them would have their food in Thiruvávaduthurai choultry and visit these scholars during the forenoons and afternoons to learn from them. Some of them would cook their own food there. As per Subramanya Desikar's directive Mutt supplied them rice and other provisions.

Students of Music:

Some persons learnt music from the music vidwáns and nágaswara exponents belonging to the Mutt. Music vidwáns often visited the Mutt and gave performances, yielding a lot of benefit to Music students.

Tamil Students:

Many students learnt Tamil under Pillaivál and Desikar. This group included Brahmins, Saivites and those belonging to other communities. The Brahmin students had their food at the choultry. Saiva Vellálás joined the others during the meal time at the Mutt. Appropriate food arrangements were also made to the other students. Some elderly Thambiráns and some junior Thambiráns were also learning Tamil under Pillaivál. Annasámi Iyer, Sáthanur Subramanya Iyer and Kanjanur Sáminátha Iyer were some of the

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important Brahmin students. Melagaran Shanbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar, Vikramasingapuram Ananthakrishna Kaviráyar, Madurai Sáminátha Pillai, Mugavur Arunáchala Kaviráyar, Chandrasekara Mudaliár and Boominátha Chettiár were all Saivites. There was one Ramakrishna Pillai; he was a Vaishnava Vellálá. While there were students drawn from many communities and different levels, we all lived together as one happy family. Subramanya Desikar lavished affection and concern on all students. He had directed that there should be no shortcoming in taking care of these students. He but rarely got angry. Any anger would have a sound basis if anyone in the Mutt caused any problem for any of the students. Desikar's anger would truly be intense.

University:

If any foreigner with no knowledge of the Mutt, visited the Mutt he would well imagine it to be a university. There was no pomp about the place; no fanfare; no public display. There were no barriers between communities and groups. There were resources; and there was a benefactor who used it meaningfully; his heart was full of love; there was camaraderie and unity amongst everyone; there was an atmosphere of learning. Each day was a celebration, catering to the hunger of the stomach and the hunger of the intellect.

How can there be any bar to the flowering of knowledge in such a setting? It was a temple of learning where Devi Saraswathi ever performed her dance of ecstasy.

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50. MAHÁ VAIDYANÁTHA IYER

During the spare time when we did not have lessons, we students used to revise the old lessons. Sometimes I would be writing the new verses and letters dictated by my teacher.

Desikar's Method of Teaching:

Whenever he had time, Desikar himself would take lessons for the students. He was particularly interested in the Parimelazhagar commentary of Thirukkural. His lessons would cover this text as also Thirukkovaiyár Grammar Treatise. Desikar's methodical exposition of grammar concepts, interspersed with Sanskrit terms and the information in Sanskrit texts, was very interesting.

He would take lessons on a few specific texts. But his exposition was always precise and lucid. There was no ego element in it. If he found any portion of a text not very clear to him he would openly declare that he should consult Pillaivál.

How Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer Earned His Title:

On some days when there was no lesson during the night, I used to go to Subramanya Desikar. He would en-

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quire about the lessons being handled by Pillaivál; he would seek information on valuable new insights and genuinely appreciate it. He would narrate many old historical incidents. As he knew of my training in Music, he would share many interesting details about music vidwáns.

"Do you know Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer?" He asked one day.

"I have heard about him; never had the privilege of seeing him," I replied.

"You should definitely see him and move with him. He is one of the important personages associated with the Mutt. Like Pillaivál is to Tamil, so is he as regards music. He is also well trained in Tamil. He would often come here and regale us."

"It is my misfortune that I have not so far listened to his music, " I mentioned.

"We first met him in Kallidaikurichi as the Junior Head of the Mutt. He was then very young. Even at that age he had remarkable proficiency in music. Many vidwáns had come there, including Senior Vaidyanátha Iyer and Junior Vaidyanátha Iyer. Like here many music vidwáns used to visit Kallidaikurichi also. One day we arranged a large conference and asked the three Vaidyanátha Iyer's to sing. Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's music excelled that of the others. The other vidwáns who competed with him conceded this point. At that conference, with the endorsement of the other vidwáns, he was conferred the title of Mahá - The Great. Till then he was a mere Vaidyanátha Iyer with no honorific prefix, but thereafter everyone referred to him as Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer."

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Subramanya Desikar further expatiated on the greatness of the music virtuoso. He added, "Mahá Vaidyanathâyar's elder brother Rámasámi Iyer was well versed in Tamil to compose verses and keerthanás. He had composed the entire Periya Puránam in the form of keerthanás. He was responsible for Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's proficiency in Tamil.

Ever since I learnt about Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's greatness and the Sannidánam's regard for him, I became eager to meet the great man. My desire became twofold when I heard about his erudition in Tamil. The time arrived for my desire to be fulfilled. One day he came to the Mutt in the company of a saint by name Kodaganallur Sri Sundara Swámigal.

Sundara Swámigal:

Sundara Swámi was a saint who had risen above considerations of castes and Orders. He was very knowledgeable in Vedántá texts and Shivapuránams. He had sown the seeds of Shiva bhakthi in people by his exposition of *Soodhasamhitá*, a major Saivite devotional and philosophical text.

There are seven sacred bathing sites associated with Thiruvaiyáru. He arranged for the renovation of these seven sacred sites as also the one at Thirumazhappádi, with donation from many rich devotees. With a view to celebrating the simultaneous consecration ceremonies at these eight holy sites, he had been collecting donations from rich Saivite devotees.

He had many devotees, drawn from different communities. Mahá VVaidyanátha Iyer had received sacred manthrá initiation from him and also learnt Vedánthá texts from

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him. One Ayyásámi Pillai of Thirunelveli had also received initiation from Swámigal, built a Mutt and was engaged in philosophical enquiry and Gnáná practice. He was also deeply versed in texts such as Páduthurai composed by Thaththuvaráyar.

Sundara Swámigal had come to Thiruvávaduthurai to obtain financial support for the proposed consecration ceremony. He was accompanied by many devotees including Mahá Vaidyanáthayyar and Thirunelveli Ayyásámi Pillai.

Pillaivál had known Sundara Swámigal even earlier. He had translated Soodhasamhitá into Tamil in the form of verses. Sundara Swámigal would listen to these verses from Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer savour its beauty and laud him. As a person with deep insight into the Sanskrit original text of Soodha Samhithá, Sundara Swámigal could appreciate the merit of the Tamil translation. He used to intersperse his discourses on 'Soodha Samhithá' with Pillaivál's Tamil verses.

Swámigal stayed in a place with his retinue and sent an emissary to find out when he could conveniently call on Subramania Desikar. In the meanwhile, on learning about his arrival, my guru went to Swámigal and paid obeisance to him.

Swámigal and Desikar:

Then my teacher and Swámigal were engaged in a lively discussion related to Saivism. We could glean from their conversation many remarkable strands of information.

On learning that Subramanya Desikar was awaiting his arrival, Swámigal and others set out towards the Mutt. Desikar came up to the entrance of the audience hall, received Swámigal, offered him a seat and seated himself on

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his throne. Everyone present was all attention. In my great eagerness I was looking alternately at Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and Sundara Swámigal.

Desikar and Swámigal initially exchanged pleasantries and then got down to discussing spiritual issues. Swámigal mentioned about the purpose of his visit. Desikar agreed to provide suitable assistance.

My Desire:

Seeing Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer filled me with great happiness. The gleam and the poise in his face highlighted his essential nature. I was not only captivated by his presence but was enraptured by the sweetness of his words. Even this did not satisfy me in full. I was not hoping to listen to his music which had given him his special title. 'After all, he has come here for a different purpose. In this setting is it realistic to expect him to sing a piece or two just to slake my thirst? Is it at all possible to convey to him my intense desire? Will he do the favour of singing at least one piece? One or a hundred pieces - is this the proper occasion? A churn of thoughts filled my mind. I barely noticed what Sundara Swámigal and Desikar were discussing.

Now, a pleasant surprise overtook me. Desikar made a request to Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer: "The students here are all eagerness to listen to your music. It would indeed be great if you could sing a few compositions of Pillaivál." I could barely believe my ears. 'Am I dreaming? Is it but a daydream emerging from my thoughts?' No, no. it was for real.

Celestial Music:

"No problem. I am ready," said Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and started singing. I felt that if there was divine mu-

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sic, I was hearing it. He started with some verses from the Tamil version of Soodha Samhithá. It captured my heart all the more because it was Tamil poetry. It also had the additional merit that it was Pillaivál's composition. Coupled with Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's melody those verses gained a sparkle. It made me forget this world. As he sang, each word appeared to enter my heart as a gentle drizzle and drew a magnificent picture on my mind's canvas.

Those verses portrayed Lord Shivá enthroned in Mount Kailásh. Even while merely reading those verses a grand picture would emerge in our minds but, when those verses came forth mingled with melody we forgot everything. Just as a song aligned seamlessly with the rhythm, my heart got dissolved in the mood of the song. Only when he completed a piece we became aware of the dualism of his singing and our listening.

After completing each song he also explained its meaning. But the way he sang, the meaning and the spirit of the song flowed with his music.

When one starts singing would there be a mood to stop? Would the listeners ever get satiated? The torrent of this music surged into different channels. He sang many of the compositions of Pillaivál.

Then Subramanya Desikar made a request: "Could you please sing a few pieces from your elder brother's composition of Periya Purána keerthanás?" Desikar was fully aware of Vaidyanátha Iyer's repertoire. He kept asking for more and the music virtuoso kept singing happily.

When he was singing there were no accompaniments such as violin and Mridangam. I didn't feel any shortcoming to the music on this account. As he kept time while sing-

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ing by gently tapping on his thigh, the listeners' hearts resonated as instrumental accompaniments.

Peerless Pleasure:

That day I experienced an ecstasy as never before. 'May I join this great man and learn music?' Even such a desire raised its head. Eventually Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's musical outpouring stopped. Sundara Swámigal took leave. Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer also took leave along with him. All of them had their meal in their respective places, and left for Thiruvaiyáru in the afternoon.

When I saw Subramanya Desikar that afternoon, he asked me, "Did you listen to Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's music this morning?" "I had never heard such ecstatic music till now. His voice borders on the divine. This can't be achieved by mere practice," I said.

"It is true that practice alone is not adequate. He is an ardent Shivá devotee. Lord Shivá's benediction has blessed him with such a fine voice. His intensive practice lends richness to the voice. Further, the purity of his conduct tends to protect the beauty of his voice," said Desikar and added, "You must have also observed his knowledge of Tamil."

"Yes, Swámi. It was evident in the way he enunciated the words in the verses."

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51. CHIDAMBARAM PILLAI'S WEDDING

There were two levels of lessons in the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. The junior level lessons used to be conducted in the afternoons. Subsequently, as desired by Pazhanikumára Thambirán and Ārumuga Thambirán, this lesson was shifted to the morning session. The classes attended by Kumárasámi Thambirán and myself were conducted in the afternoons and late evenings. After completing *Thirunágai Karona Puránam*, we started studying *Kási Kándam* and *Brammothra Kándam*. The lesson was proceeding at a rapid pace. One Kannappa Thambirán and Kumbakonam Vaidyanátha Desikar were also in the class. They were both experts in music.

Kumárapuri Padalam:

Kumárapuri Padalam was a section in the first canto of Kandapuránam. It contains a piece of information that Lord Murugá had created a place called Seignaloor and lived there. That was also the place of birth of Lord Chandigeswarar.

When Lord Murugá lived there, the Devás and Indrá had also accompanied him and lived there. The poet describes Indrá's sleepless lament all night due to his separation from his wife Indráni. The section describes in some detail Indrá's suppressed passion.

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Sáminátha Pillai:

After a few days Sáminátha Pillai from Vandánam village in Thirunelveli District came to the Mutt to study Tamil. My teacher and Subramania Desikar used to teach Tamil verses to those with some training in the field. Some old students also used to teach the new arrivals. This work was undertaken mainly by Kumárasámi Thambirán and myself.

Sáminátha Pillai was related to Kumárasámi Thambirán before he became a monk in the Mutt. He was studying under Thambirán. One day his lesson extended up to ten in the night. Then Thambirán went to sleep. I also lay down there and dozed off.

Seignaloor Indiran:

When Kumárasámi Thambirán happened to wake up around midnight he found Sáminátha Pillai leaning against the pillar without lying down and sleeping. He was wondering why he was sitting there like this. 'He is possibly thinking about something. Let's not disturb him', Thambirán thought and resumed his sleep. After a while he opened his eyes again only to find his student sitting in the same posture. He found him frozen in the same posture four more times during the night. 'He appears to be assailed by some worries. I should find out the cause and try to help him out,' he concluded.

It was Thambirán's practice to wake up at five in the morning and proceed to Káveri for his bath. When he woke up in the morning he found Sáminátha Pillai in the same posture. "I have seen you like this all through the night. Any reason? Any worry?"

As if woken up from a dream Pillai replied, "I have been lost in thoughts of her."

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The student was already married. He had come away from his wife, and Thambirán knew about it. So he could understand Sáminátha Pillai's anguish.

As soon as I woke up, Thambirán asked me with a smile, "Seignaloor Indiran is right here. Do you know?"

I could not understand what he meant.

"Don't you remember that in the *Kumárapuri Padalam* of *Kanda Puránam Indrá* had spent sleepless nights in sorrow?"

"Of course, I do. Ayyá Avargal had told us that such scenes would appear in the epics and puránás."

"I don't mean that. Indrá had spent sleepless night in Seignaloor thinking of his Indráni. That Indrá has incarnated here as Sáminátha Pillai." Then he looked at the student and smiled, and he bowed down his head.

When Kumárasámi Thambirán explained the matter to me I too joined in his laughter. Thereafter we used to call that student Seignalloor Indrá.

Chidambaram Pillai - Marriage attempts:

My teacher had a son by name Chidambaram Pillai. As he had reached marriageable age, attempts were on to arrange his wedding. They zeroed in on the daughter of Seerkázhi Gurusámi Pillai and decided to conduct the marriage at Máyuram. Sri Subramanya Desikar, the Thambiráns employed at the Mutt and other dignitaries extended financial support. Teacher moved to Máyuram to look after the arrangements. I too went with him.

Sri Namachiváya Desikar:

The wedding invitations were sent to many dignitaries living in other places. Detailed letters were also sent to a

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few persons. It was Pillaivál's practice to write a new verse at the top of every letter. I was the one who wrote all the letters. While commencing the letter to Namachiváya Desikar - the Junior Pandára Sannadhi - he dictated five verses about him. After completing the letter, he explained to me about Namachiváya Desikar's quality.

"Sri Namachiváya Desikar is an erudite scholar. Well trained in Tamil and Sanskrit. Would constantly be teaching disciples. Also competent in worldly matters. Had introduced many reforms while at Kallidaikkurichi. Nobody can take him for a ride. He would indeed be happy to see you".

"Why is he at Kallidaikkurichi instead of being at Thiruvávaduthurai?" I asked.

"Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt owns many villages in Thirunelveli District. There are many around Kallidaikkurichi. He has been posted there to administer these estates. Like in Thiruvávaduthurai, there is a Mutt, associated places like a temple and retinue of officials and attendants in Kallidaikkurichi too. During his days as Junior Head of the Mutt, the present Mahá Sannidánam had occupied that position for a few years at Kallidaikkurichi. Thiruvávaduthurai is like the capital of the entire Mutt complex. Kallidaikkurichi is like a princely city. It was a practice for the Junior Heads to be stationed at Kallidaikurichi. They were also called princes.."

"It appears as if Thiruvávaduthurai Ādheenam holds sway over the entire Tamil Nadu," I exclaimed in surprise.

"The greatness of the Mutt will be revealing itself to you only gradually. Wherever disciples are settled there are Ādheenam links there. Ādheenam has connections with all the major Saivite sites from Kási to Kanyákumari." My teacher explained.

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Many of the dignitaries to whom Pillaivál had sent letters of invitation responded with happiness. Namachiváya Desikar had also replied.

Chidambaram Pillai's marriage was celebrated in a grand manner at the appointed muhoortham. Many dignitaries attended the wedding. I found it beneficial to get to know them.

Marriage Events:

The officials from Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt provided appropriate assistance at the wedding. My colleague Saverinátha Pillai was constantly busy attending to many chores. I also contributed my humble mite.

The muhoortham day was marked by many events: a musical concert, a punning and jesting session, a Bharathanátyam concert and instrumental music. The event was celebrated with all the splendour normally associated with the weddings in zamindár households. Some of the assembled dignitaries passed on some money to the Bharathanátyam dancers.

At that point Pillaivál called me aside, gave me one rupee and asked me to hand it over to the dance artiste. I felt very shy. Even so I had to obey my teacher. By this act too the people assembled there realized the depth of Pillaivál's affection towards me.

Thanjaivánan Kovai:

We stayed on in Máyuram for a few weeks after the wedding. Saverinátha Pillai and I were revising our own lessons. We were also simultaneously studying *Thanjaivánan Kovai* text under our teacher. He explained the various aspects of Akam genre texts. Though I had already learnt many aspects when I studied *Seekázhi Kovai*, I could re-

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furbish my knowledge during these lessons and also learnt many other new aspects.

My teacher explained that Thanjaivánan was a Vellálá magnate, was a commander in the Pándyá army and belonged to a place called Thanjávoor.

He also explained in detail the history of Poyyámozhippulavar, the author of Thanjaivánan Kovai.

Appádurai Iyer:

I spent two months in Máyuram. As desired by Pillaivál, I had my meals in the house of one Appádurai Iyer at the Mayuranátha Swámi Temple Sannidhi Street. He and his wife were affectionate towards me. He did not receive any support on my behalf from the Mutt or from Pillaivál. I was practically penniless. I had hoped that arrangements would be made to provide him with rice and other provisions. But nothing like that materialized. Having learnt that he himself was indigent I felt bad to be a burden on him. I felt helpless.

Fruit and Milk:

One night the lesson with Pillaivál extended up to nine. On completion of the lesson all the students dispersed for their night meal. It was raining heavily. As I was very tired and sleepy I lay down in one corner without food and slept off. On returning from his night meal Pillaivál saw me lying down. It was my daily practice to return from my night meal, spend some time discussing with my teacher and then only go to sleep. As I had departed from this practice that night, he thought that I had not had my meal and had me woken up. He ascertained the truth from me and sent me with a person to have my meal and come back. As it was late everyone in Appádurai Iyer's house had already gone

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to sleep. My visit to a few other places also drew a blank. My teacher felt very sad, gave me some fruit and milk. The next morning he called me and said, "Please go to Thiruvávaduthurai and revise the old lessons with the other students there. I'll be coming there soon."

I could not understand why he said so. "Why not I stay on here and accompany Ayyá to Thiruvávaduthurai?" I asked him.

"No. Your meal arrangements are not satisfactory here. Sannidánam would take care of everything at Thiruvávaduthurai." I did not have the courage to contradict him and set out to do accordingly.

Poor the Means and Rich the Heart:

Before leaving for Thiruvávaduthurai I went to Appádurai Iyer's house to take leave of him. I was anguished that I had not repaid my debt of gratitude to him. Suddenly I remembered the silver waist-string I was wearing. It had been made for me by my uncle as a double string. I handed over the silver string to him; "I am now leaving for Thiruvávaduthurai. I had caused you hardship all these days. Please take this. I will later send money for your expenses and take it back."

He returned it and told me, "My dear boy, what on earth are you doing? Have we got impoverished merely by sharing our meal with you? What special arrangements have we at all made for your sake? All we did was to share our modest meal with you. You should study well and come up in life: that is the gift we would cherish." While his income was meagre and access to facilities sparse, I realized how expansive was his heart. I felt overwhelmed. 'These are the jewels of humanity. Only for their sake rains come down

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and the sun rises', I told myself. I prostrated at his and his wife's feet and left.

What could I do when he had stoutly refused to accept the silver waist-string. My heart yearned for the day when I could repay my debt. Later when I got a job I could do it.

Then I took leave of Pillaivál and others and left for Thiruvávaduthurai.

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52. THIRUPPERUNTHURAI PURÁNAM

After I reached Thiruvávaduthurai as directed by my teacher I felt very sad at the separation. But Subramania Desikar's affection and my acquaintance with the Thambiráns there somewhat mitigated that sadness. In Thiruvávaduthurai I had no problems related to food. I could also spend my time pleasantly. Kumárasámi Thambirán's company gave me relief. As directed by my guru I moved with all the Thambiráns with caution and respect.

Desikar's Order:

When I was speaking to Subramania Desikar one night, he told me, "You should carry a message to Pillaivál."

"I am waiting to do you bidding," I replied respectfully.

Subramania Thambirán who was managing the temple affairs at Thirupperunthurai, had made a submission to Subramania Desikar. He had requested the Sannidánam to direct Pillaivál to compose a Puránam on that holy site, and that he would grant him a gift of two thousand rupees after the formal launch of the Puránam. Desikar explained the contents of the letter and told me, "This request has come at the right time. Pillaivál may be under some financial strain after his son's wedding. This could help relieve that burden. Please explain this matter clearly to him and inform him that we also find the idea beneficial from a num-

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ber of angles. The Thambirán has sent the Tamil translation of a Sanskrit Puránam on Thiruperunthurai as also two old Puránams concerning that holy site. Please hand over these texts to Pillaivál."

A Verse Line:

I walked to Máyuram the very next morning. I explained the matter to my teacher and handed over the books. He accepted them with pleasure. At that point his mind should have travelled to the Thiruperunthurai Vináyakar temple. But he didn't say in as many words that he would take up the assignment or that he could set out to Thiruvávaduthurai. A line from a verse issued forth from him:

'Nilavuvanda mudiyinodu veyiluvanda
Mazhakalitrai ninaidu vázhvám'.
(Luxuriate let us
In the thoughts of
Charming Elephant God
Beloved of the Lord
With crescent-decked tresses)

I took it to be the veritable starting point of the Puránam. 'Veyiluvanda Vináyakar' is the holy name of the Vináyaká icon at the Thirupperunthurai temple. 'Veyiluvanda' is a term signifying that icon's longing for the sun. The poet connecting the blazing sun with the charming crescent in the same verse! I found this poetic finesse alluring. I did not inscribe it in the palm leaf but treasured it in my mind.

"It is my pleasure to do Sannidánam's bidding. Have you seen Thirupperunthurai?"

"No. I have heard Ayyá mention that this is a holy site sanctified by the association of Mánikkavásagar."

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"Yes. It is a fine site. It is now widely known as Ávudaiyár Koil. With god's grace if we get to formally launch the Puránam, you'll be seeing all these places."

I developed a desire to see Thirupperunthurai; even preceding that was my desire to write down that Sthalapuráná to be dictated by my guru.

I stayed in Máyuram for three days. Then I accompanied my teacher to Thiruvávaduthurai.

The lessons commenced as usual at Thiruvávaduthurai. Kanda Puránam was started in the Senior Class. In the Junior Class, the lessons covered Thiruvilaiyádal, Thirunágai Karona Puránam and Máyura Puránam.

Kumárasámi Thambirán:

Kumárasámi Thambirán's time had to be increasingly devoted to the Mutt administration. He was staying in Periya Odukkam. Odukkam is the name of the section in the Mutt where the Head of the Mutt stayed. The Thambirán who took care of important matters as a private secretary of the Sannidánam was called 'Odukka Thambirán'. Only those who enjoyed the confidence of the Sannidánam were appointed to this important position. There were two sections in this role: Junior Odukkam and Senior Odukkam. The Junior Odukkam was involved in arranging the supplies for worship: fruits, sandal paste, rock-candy and poojá perfumes. Jewels, expensive silks and other valuables were under Senior Odukkam's control. Senior Odukkams were generally experienced persons. Kumárasámi Thambirán started shouldering this responsibility. Additionally he was also designated as the vidwán of the Mutt. The title of vidwán and the associated perks with it of a palanquin were also given to him.

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Change in the Lesson Schedule:

Because of his new responsibility he could not attend the classes on a daily basis. The so-called Senior Class was in fact meant only for Kumárasámi Thambirán. In the changed situation the separation between the two sections disappeared. All the Thambiráns attended the classes together, both during the mornings and evenings. Kumárasámi Thambirán joined off and on, subject to the exigencies of his work.

Beginning the Puránam:

After a few days, Pillaivál started composing the Thirupperunthurai Puránam. It started with an invocation to Lord Vináyaká. Teacher did not remember the line mentioned by him while I met him at Máyuram. So he dictated another verse. After that I told him, "When I had met you at Máyuram in this connection you had mentioned a line about Veyiluvanda Vináyaká. I happed to remember it." I also mentioned that line.

At once he composed another verse using that line as the last line. I wrote it down. I kept writing as he kept dictating. In a few days the sections on Invocation and the description of the holy site (Náttu Padalam) were completed. Two earlier Tamil Puránams on Thirupperunthurai were composed mainly as Sthala Puráná or History of the Site. But the Puránams composed by Pillaivál were full of poetic beauty and imagination covering fine descriptions of the countryside and the towns and also engaging scenes. Those who were aware of this aspect wanted Pillaivál to compose a Puránam for their towns as well. The effort to get a Puránam composed on Thirupperunthurai was also based on such a desire.

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So Pillaivál described the glory of the countryside elaborately. This Náttu Padalam was completed with 121 verses. Along with the invocatory section, 158 verses were composed. Subramania Desikar used to enquire with Pillaivál about the progress of the Puránam. Whenever I met him alone he would enquire with me too. I would explain the progress in terms of different sections. I could see that he had a desire to hear the verses.

At the conclusion of *Náttu Padalam*, Master asked me to read out the verses to Sannidánam. At that point Thyágarása Chettiár had come from Kumbakonam. Desikar kept praising the verses as he listened. "Thirupperunthurai is a famous Shivá holy site, sanctified by Mánikkavásaga Swámigal's association. Befittingly this Puránam also has its own distinction. It should soon be completed and formal launch arranged," said Desikar. Chettiár also expressed his appreciation.

The great poet composed a few verses everyday. He had to often deal with visitors. The conversations with them took their own toll on time and a few days passed without any work on the Puránam. The Tamil lessons continued uninterrupted.

Periya Puránam Lesson:

At the request of the Thambiráns, Teacher started teaching Periya Puránam. At that time, Thyágarája Chettiár, Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and his elder brother Rámasámi Iyer had come to the Mutt.

Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer was pleased that I was musically reading the Periya Puránam text without breaking the melodic grammar. As he stayed in Thiruvávaduthurai for a few days. I had the opportunity to move with him and learn

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about his qualities. The more I moved with him the more I was attracted to his Shiva Bhakti, piety, disciplined ways and purity. When I observed his modesty that he had come in life mainly due to Subramania Desikar's support, I realized the depth of his becoming gratefulness.

Displaying his affection towards me he enquired about my musical training. I explained the musical background of my family and my father's musical ability. I also sang a few keerthanás of Ganam Krishna Iyer. He enjoyed listening to them.

Smallpox:

Periya Puránam lessons continued from the Kárthigai month of Ángeerasa year (November 1872). When *Kannappa Náyanár Puránam* was under way, I suddenly developed severe fever. Pusticles started appearing all over my body. Everyone identified it as Smallpox. Therefore I could not listen to Periya Puránam lessons or do any other work. I kept lying down in the vestibule of the Mutt. Pillaivál would often sit by my side and lament over my illness. As pusticles appeared on my eyelids too I could not even open my eyes. Whenever Pillaivál came up to me I would sit up in my bed. Grief would overtake me. Couldn't open my eyes. Tears would flow signifying my sadness. "I would like to go to my grandfather's house in Sooryamoolai and come back after I get well," I told my teacher. He supported my idea and started making arrangements for my journey.

At that time a dignitary from Kallidaikkurichi by name Veerarághava Iyer had come to the Mutt and stayed at the choultry with his family. His elderly mother took pity at my helpless condition. "Dear child! Don't worry. I'm here to take care of you." She stayed by my side and extended all possible help. She would stay awake all night holding my

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hand. At a mere hint that I was thirsty she would prepare hot water and give me. The goddess associated with Smallpox was giving me all the misery; in the midst of this misery the very goddess appeared to have come unto me in the form of the Good Samaritan.

The Guru Poojá scheduled for the Thai month was approaching. I thought it would not be proper for me to stay at Thiruvávaduthurai, what with my illness and the expected throng of visitors. Only bearing this in mind I had told my teacher that I would like to go to Sooryamoolai.

Taking Leave:

Taking into account my illness and the resultant grief of Pillaivál, Subramania Desikar directed that the Periya Puránam lessons be stopped for the time being.

He arranged for my journey to Sooryamoolai in a palanquin. The palanquin had no cover. It had a curved bamboo for its beam. Nothing more could be done as the journey was arranged in a hurry. With my eyes closed I took leave of everyone. Pillaivál and others were very sad to see me in that condition.

"Sáminathayyar, so you are off?" With grief choking him my guru spoke to me in a faltering voice.

I remained speechless and sobbed. I set off to Sooryamoolai at eight in the morning. Pillaivál sent a student by name Hariharaputhra Pillai to accompany me during the journey. Those days there was no convenient road to Sooryamoolai from Thiruvávaduthurai. We had to walk along the field ridges. The distance between me and Pillaivál increased with every step. 'Would the distance keep increasing?' I was assailed by the thought. My stomach churned.

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As the palanquin was negotiating a grove near Sooryamoolai my father came from the opposite direction. He was shocked to see my condition. The way he was coming indicated something special. I could not open my eyes properly. "Go home first. We will talk later," my father said.

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53. SMALLPOX MARKS

It was eleven in the morning when I reached Sooryamoolai. As I was down with Smallpox, people there would not allow me to enter my uncle's house. A few persons had come from outside villages too. The palanquin carrying me was set down in a coconut grove.

I was at a loss. When I came to know why so many persons had assembled there, I received a rude shock. The previous day my loving grand father Krishna Sásthrigal who had inculcated Shiva Bhakti in me early in my life, had been gathered to the feet of the Lord. I was forlorn that I would never again hear his sweet words or encounter the glory of his Shiva poojá.

Confused State:

As I was lying in anguish at the grove, in the palanquin, my uncle Sivarámayyar, my father and others came by after completing the ceremony of collecting the ashes. My uncle flew into a fury at those who had not admitted me in his house. "He is our child. If it can't be of use when he is in distress, what the hell is the use of this house? How dare you dump him in the grove like a beggar? How stone-hearted of you!" He opened another empty house owned by him and had me quickly taken there.

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Then my father and mother were overtaken by grief on seeing my condition. I stayed on in that house, with a few persons attending to my needs. People around stated that I had been struck by Panaiyeri Ammai, a particularly virulent form of smallpox. I sent word to my teacher through Hariharaputhra Pillai that I had reached Sooryamoolai safely.

Severity of Smallpox:

One day my condition became acute. I lost my consciousness. Everyone around got scared. My mother and father started shedding tears.

When I regained my consciousness somewhat I felt that I was in a critical condition. I looked towards my sobbing mother and told her in a feeble voice, "I am on my way out without having been of any use to you since my birth." On hearing this she started wailing. My father too was immersed in sadness. My younger brother, a mere infant, was lost in puzzlement.

With god's grace I escaped that calamity. While the attack was indeed severe, it cost no permanent damage to me except leaving scars on my body. I still have a few of those scars on my body as a dark remainder of the profound sorrow of the loss of my grand father at that time.

I was in much agony throughout the Márkazhi month. Then the Thai month appeared. My condition was returning to normalcy. I was given my first bath after the Smallpox attack. The Gurupoojá was celebrated in Thiruvávaduthurai on the day of Ashwathi star. That night I was sitting on the thinnai of my uncle's house in Sooryamoolai. Even from there the fireworks and illuminations in Thiruvávaduthurai were visible. The scenes I had witnessed the previous year at Thiruvávaduthurai started unfolding in my mind. I re-

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called my guru composing verses all night to a number of persons. 'Alas! I am not destined to witness those scenes this year,' I lamented.

'During my absence what new lessons would have been taught to the other students! What new and valuable information I have missed?' This thought also bothered me. Later I heard that Pillaivál had visited a number of places during the month of Márkazhi and had returned to Thiruvávaduthurai only during the month of Thai for Gurupoojá. This gave me relief that I had not missed much. Pillaivál used to frequently send some persons from Thiruvávaduthurai to ascertain my welfare.

Mahámaham:

That year (1873) was a Mahámaham year. I had heard that huge crowds would throng at Kumbakonam during the Mahámaham celebrations and that many scholarly meetings would be held. I learnt that Sri Subramania Desikar would land there with his retinue, that many scholars would assemble in his presence and that Pillaivál would also stay with him there. 'How terrible is my misfortune! I had to miss this famous celebration occurring once in twelve years! I have been struck by a disease which prevents me from being with Pillaivál and delighting in the many festivities during this auspicious occasion.' I languished under such recurring thoughts. Some persons from Sooryamoolai had returned after attending the Mahámaham celebrations. They narrated in some detail the various aspects of the festival and also mentioned that Subramania Desikar and Pillaivál had come there. This made my sense of loss and sadness all the more intense.

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Rejoining My Master:

With my health condition gradually getting better, I kept saying that I should be joining Pillaivál very soon. My father understood my passion to resume my lessons and took me to Thiruvávaduthurai on the 17th of Másí Month (26.2.1873), a Wednesday evening.

The atmosphere in the Mutt was full of life. The dignitaries and the scholars who had visited Mahámaham had come to Thiruvávaduthurai along with Desikar. They all stayed in the places assigned to them.

Pillaivál was in the eastern garden house of the Mutt and was engaged in a lively discussion with many persons. I went up to him. Thinking that he would feel sad to see the scars on my body I had smeared a lot of holy ash on my body in an attempt to conceal the pock-marks.

As soon as he saw me Master told me affectionately, "Oh! Is it Sáminathayyar? Have you fully recovered? You seem to have put on an armour of holy ash to conceal the pock-marks on your body. You have always been in my mind. The Periya Puránam lessons have stopped with Kannappa Náyanár Puránam. It would indeed have been nice if you had joined us at the Mahámaham festival." He also enquired about my father's welfare.

Rámasámi Pillai:

A Tamil vidwán by name Madurai Rámasámi Pillai was there. He was a disciple of Pillaivál. He also knew Ārumuga Návalar. He was reading out some of the texts composed by him to Pillaivál and was noting down the corrections suggested by him.

I had heard about him earlier. Pillaivál introduced me to all the people assembled there.

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Master's Desire:

Observing my feeble health Master told my father, "He has not yet fully recovered, the food arrangements are not adequate here. He can gain strength only with his mother's food. It's better that he stays for a few more days in your place and return after he fully recovers and regains strength." I was afraid that he might dispatch me again to my place.

"I must confess, however, that it would be difficult for me to be separated from him. After he left last time I had gone to a number of villages. And, Gurupoojá followed. Then came Mahámaham. There were no lessons during that period. I believe it is not a good idea to stop the lesson any longer. If you take a particular step it would be convenient," Master added.

"Pray tell me what should I do?"

"It would be good from more than one angle if you could move here for some time with his mother and also your poojá paraphernalia and take care of him."

"I would sure do as you are suggesting. There is no problem." father's reply left me overjoyed.

Soon enough father came back with my mother. Pillaivál made necessary arrangements with the help of the officials of the Mutt.

The Periya Puránam lessons resumed. Some students studied *Nannool Virutthi* Commentary and a few others Kándigai commentary. I also joined them.

Two Disciples:

Two ordained priests also joined as students. Some of the students displayed animus towards them. I could not

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figure out the reason; later I came to know about the cause. These two persons had caused many hurdles during the launching of Pillaivál's Thiruvidaimarudur Ulá. The Ulá text contained descriptions of the erotic reaction of small girls to ripe grown-up women when Lord Shivá came in a procession. These two persons had reportedly complained to some Maharáshtrians of Thiruvidaimarudur who were royal relatives: "The poet had composed an Ulá about the place. He says that when the Lord consecrated at this holly site went on a procession, the women in the street had blabbered in erotic stupor. You people are living in that street. Would this not lend a bad name to the women of our community?" Their slander had had some effect. This caused a lot of hardship to Pillaivál.

But when they were studying under him, Pillaivál, the Paragon of Graciousness showed no ill-feelings towards them; in fact he dealt with them very genially. But the other students continued to be antagonistic towards them. When I heard about the story I also got angry with them. I would often grill them with questions on Nannool and embarrass them. They would wear a withered look. Off and on I would make indirect references to their past misdemeanour. I believe my respect for Pillaivál and my youthful temper were behind my action.

Taking note of their misery due to our frequent taunts, Master gave a hint that we should desist from such behaviour. But our antagonism would not subside. We would keep quiet on the days Master tendered the advice. Soon enough the taunts would raise their head again. One day Pillaivál raised this problem with Desikar: "These boys are angry with them. It is true that these two persons had misbehaved with this humble self. Having known about it, these boys have been harassing them no end. As I am also a party in this matter in a manner of speaking, I am not in a position

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to pacify them. I hope that Sannidánam would be pleased to give a piece of advice to those students to stop." At once Desikar called us and advised us that it would not be proper on our part to show enmity to those two persons who had come to the Mutt to learn under our teacher. Since then we renounced our antagonism and started being friendly towards them.

Thirucchitrambala Kaviráyar:

Our teacher was taking lessons on Thirucchitrambala Kaviráyar for me and Maruda Pandáram, one of those two persons. Apart from attending the classes we also used to sit alone and think about the text. One day a few Thambiráns and officials had assembled in the Mutt courtyard. Some of them requested me to recite a few verses from Kaivráyar and also explain the meaning. I recited a few verses in Bhairavi rágá and explained the meaning in detail. They were all happy and satisfied.

An elderly monk by name Vaidyalinga Thambirán who was listening to my exposition, asked me if I had a copy of the Kovaiyár text. When I answered in the negative, he immediately went to his room and brought an old printed version of Thiruvásagam and Kovaiyár which he had preserved very carefully. I gratefully received the book saying, "If only I could derive such benefit, I'll be more than happy to deliver such a discourse everyday."

In the meanwhile my teacher was composing verses of the forthcoming Thirupperunthurai Puránam. He had incurred some debt in connection with his son's wedding. He was at a loss to find a way out. With this worry and the burden of teaching, he could not progress with the Puránam with his usual enthusiasm. The work was proceeding only at a slow pace. ◈

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54. A VERSE ON STYLUS

My teacher had spent beyond his means for his son Chidrambaram Pillai's wedding. It was a pleasure when expenditure was being incurred. After the wedding when demands came from the textile shops and provision stores, he came to realize the extent of wedding expenses. He was seized with the worry of how to settle these debts. The pressure started increasing. He was full of anguish.

There was no benefactor who would favour him with a large sum to overcome the debt. He also had no other means of earning money. It was a practice those days that if a poet completed and launched an assigned task of composing a literary work, the person who commissioned the work would pay him a handsome amount. No other course was in sight. He had a hope of getting about two thousand rupees on the formal launch of *Thirupperunthurai Puránam*. But the Puránam itself was only at the initial stage. The money can be realized only after completing the work and getting it formally launched. How to deal with the creditors till then!

Ever a Debtor:

An idea crossed his mind: 'I would in any case be getting money after the launch of Thirupperunthurai Puránam. In the meanwhile I can approach one of the Mutt officials for a loan of five hundred rupees to settle urgent debts. I can

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return the amount later.' His life was proceeding only on this basis. Household expenses remained uncontrolled. He would keep raising loans.

If he launched a Puránam somewhere, he would get one thousand or two thousand rupees and could settle the debt with that money. While the Mutt provided facilities for his food and other requirements, he did not have any regular income to meet his somewhat extravagant ways. His kind heart and generous disposition left him in perpetual debt.

Thambirán refuses to lend:

My guru requested Kumárasámi Thambirán to seek a loan on his behalf from another Thambirán, an important administrator in the Mutt. That Thambirán did not agree.

At that point he sharply realized the pain of seeking loan from others. 'I have been associated with this Mutt for so long. He knows that I am held in esteem by everyone here. Even so he refuses lend money to me. This seems to be the way of the world. Only on such occasions do we get to know the nature of people. But why blame them! We should be careful in managing our affairs. If a monk like him behaves like this, what better can we expect from lay persons!' Such thoughts kept bothering him. He tried to raise some loan from a few others, but in vain.

As the Ādheenam had already helped him on a number of occasions and as the Mutt itself was under some financial strain, he was not inclined to flag his problem with the Sannidánam. With no way in sight to resolve his financial problems he thought of spending some time somewhere else and return after gaining some peace of mind. He gave a hint to his students that he was planning a trip to a few places.

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The students came to know of the cause of Master's worry. "If Ayyá Avargal is proceeding to some outside place I would also definitely go with him," said each student with a semblance of determination. The strength of their resolve became evident only later!

Journey to Patteeswaram:

After much thought my teacher decided to go to Patteeswaram, discreetly informed Subramania Desikar and obtained his permission. At that point my parents were in Thiruvávaduthurai. After the journey was finalized Pillaivál told my father: "In a few days I plan to leave for Patteeswaram and other places, after fixing an auspicious date. It might take a few months for me to return. I would suggest that you could also come to Patteeswaram along with Sáminathayyar. After a few days we may go to Āvudaiyárkoil." After some hesitation father agreed to the idea. But I was not enthusiastic about my parents coming with us. The main reason was that there may not be adequate facilities in those places for my father's daily ritual observances. The very thought of Patteeswaram gave me shivers. I had to go there only to be with Pillaivál. If my parents also accompanied us I was apprehensive in what form Ārumugathá Pillai's anger would express itself.

So I reasoned out with Pillaivál and stopped my parents accompanying us. Those days I used to wear a silver bracelet and silver chain. Master advised me, "We may have to go to different places. If you wear these ornaments you could well expose yourself to risk. So it is better you hand them over to your father." I did so accordingly.

I told my teacher that I would take my parents to Sooryamoolai and return after a few days. "That's a good idea. When you return from Sooryamoolai you can look for

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me here. If I happen to be here we can go together to Patteeswaram. Otherwise you can come there by yourself." As decided by my teacher I went to Sooryamoolai and returned to Thiruvávaduthurai.

As my teacher had already left for Patteeswaram I too went there. Arrangements were made in an Agraháram house for my food.

The day after I left for Sooryamoolai Pillaivál had moved to Patteeswaram. Only Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar had accompanied him to Patteeswaram, spent a few days there and returned to Thiruvávaduturai. No other student accompanied him.

As desired by Pillaivál, Saverinátha Pillai was staying in Master's house at Máyuram. He would often refer to the students declaring that they would come with him and eventually none of them leaving Thiruvávaduthurai. He would say, "The whole world is driven by money. Education and affection play only a supportive role." I used to be filled with satisfaction that I was fortunately not one of that tribe.

The Job of a Scribe:

Master reached Patteswaram during the Vaikási month of Srimukthá year (May 1873). He was driven by an urge to complete the Thirupperunthurai Puránam quickly. So, not a day passed without a few verses of the Puránam being composed. He would dictate a verse; I would inscribe it on the palm leaf; I would read it out; note down the corrections proposed by him; and then inscribe it again neatly on a fresh palm leaf. Because of the pressure of this work there was no time for other lessons. But I found it truly beneficial to be writing down the verses of a new Puránam and to listen to the explanations of my teacher in respect of those verses.

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Puránam Composition:

During the afternoons Pillaivál used to spend some time in Melai Pazhayárai, Patteeswaram temple and Thiruchathimutram temple. I would ever be ready with palm leaves and stylus. When it was cool and pleasant the poet had a new bout of energy and the verses would flow in torrent. Beauty of Nature infused in him redoubled creative energy. There was a Pipal tree on the banks of Thirumalairáyan river in Patteeswaram. There was a platform under the tree. He would sometimes be sitting on the platform facing the river and be dictating verses. On such occasion words of rare poetic beauty gushed forth from him.

He would mostly dictate the verses during the mornings and aftenoons. After the noon meal he would feel tired. During that interval I would be making copies of the verses in new palm leaves.

Stylus Disappears:

One morning at Melai Pazhaiyáru I was inscribing verses as dictated by my teacher. He asked me to stop the work and sent me for my breakfast. I left the palm leaves and the stylus nearby and returned after some time. During this interval he had mentally composed the new verses and was ready to dictate. So, as soon as I returned he didn't say a word but started dictating the verses.

When I looked for the palm leaves and the stylus, the stylus was missing. I started looking for it. On finding that I was not writing down the verses, Master asked me, "What's happening? Why this search?" I apprised him of the missing stylus and told him, "Someone might have kept it safe. I'll check up and come back with the stylus." My stylus was nowhere to be found. I asked the accountant who was sit-

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ting nearby. He said he didn't know. When I requested him for a substitute stylus, he replied that he had left his stylus in his house.

I recalled how, during my first visit to Patteeswaram, Ārumugatthá Pillai had hidden away my book. 'Is that misfortune tailing me again?' I trembled at the thought. With a withered face I went back to Pillaivál and informed him that I couldn't find the stylus. As he was ready to dictate the verses he had already composed in his mind, Ayyá was somewhat irritated. Would the poet's mind concentrate on composing verse or get diverted to such trivial worries?

At that point Ārumugatthá Pillai materialized from nowhere. "Why is this guy loitering here without writing?" he hissed. When Pillaivál stated the reason he laboured further on his criticism: "He is very careless. Doesn't care to keep his book or stylus secure. I've told you ever so many times. He is well and truly a useless fellow." 'O, my god! I'm caught again' – I was in despair.

Ārumugatthá Pillai's Directive!

After Pillaivál assuaged his anger with some gentle words, Ārumugatthá Pillai issued an order:

"Let's see. Let him compose a verse requesting me to give him a stylus; then I'll think of retrieving it." As I was in a perturbed state of mind, how would I have the mood to compose a verse? "Come on, do compose a verse as demanded by Thambi," my guru told me. This set me thinking.

Fortunately Ārumugatthá Pillai went towards the garden opposite. At that point my teacher dictated the final line of a Vennpá, 'Ezhuttháni Ondrenakkin dree, '(Bless me with a stylus this day). Then he slowly worked his way up

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and completed the verse. I committed the entire verse to memory. As soon as Ārumugatthá Pillai returned I recited the Vennpá.

'Thazhuvupugazh Ārumugath Thálálá endrum
Vazhuvil Puránam varaiya - mezhugil
Azhuththánip Ponnál Amaindha Uru Vitrum
Ezhuththáni Ondrenakkin ree.'

(Arumughathá
The benefactor supreme
Enveloped by fame!
Waiting am I
To inscribe
The Puránam noble.
Bless me with a stylus this day
Moulded in wax
Fashioned in gold.')

I didn't know whether it pleased him or not. The bottom line was that I got my stylus back in a short while.

Pillaivál was hurt by this incident. "We don't find anyone in this world to realize our worth and bestow love on us. What humiliation to suffer merely for a mess of pottage!"

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55. MINOR TRIPS

After I reached Patteeswaram my parents spent a week in Sooryamoolai, moved to Utthamadánapuram and started living there with my uncle's family. While at Patteeswaram my teacher and Ārumugatthá Pillai visited the holy sites of Thiruvalanchuzhi, Āvoor and Nalloor and had darshan. I too accompanied them. After the darshan in Nalloor, Master turned to me and asked, "Utthamadánapuram is somewhere here, right? How far is it?" I replied him happily, "It is about half a mile to the west. We can reach in about half an hour."

They set out and I showed them the way to my village. My parents were overwhelmed on this unexpected visit. It was about ten in the morning. My parents decided to line up a feast for Pillaivál and Ārumugatthá Pillai and set about making necessary arrangements. Concerned that it should go off well I too got involved in the effort. My uncle was all enthusiasm. The village folks also chipped in.

The Feast:

Whatever the meal my guru placed a premium on genuine affection. Árumugatthá Pillai was one for ostentation. He was quick to get upset with any real or imagined shortcoming. While going to different places with the two of them, I had observed Ārumugathá Pillai critically look at the arrangements and pick holes in them.

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So I was seized of an obsessive concern that everything should work out to his satisfaction. The feast was somehow completed. My guru expressed his profound satisfaction. There was mercifully no indication that Ārumugatthá Pillai was dissatisfied. My father was in deep conversation with Pillaivál for a long time. Then he and his younger brother sang some Tamil verses as also Rámáyaná keerthanás of Arunáchala Kavi. Everyone in the village kept coming to see Pillaivál and pay him respect; they also learnt about my progress in studies. That day my house resembled a grand wedding house. On knowing about Pillaivál's visit to Utthamadánapuram many persons from places like Málapuram, Pápanásam and Utthamadánapuram came and called on him. After spending the entire day in Utthamadánapuram we reached Patteeswaram.

Practice in composing Poetry:

One day I was chatting with an official working for Ārumugatthá Pillai and I recited a few verses composed by me. When I was singing a verse on Lord Murugá of Pazhani, my teacher was passing that way. I now remember only the last line of the verse '*Ábathai neekki yarulvái, Pazhani Yárumuganae.*" (*O six-faced Lord of Pazhani! Save me from hazards and shower your blessings*).

"What verse is this?" My teacher enquired. I recited the entire verse. When he asked regarding the authorship of the poem I modestly told him that I had composed it. "You sure have talent and you must keep practising. Then it would flow freely in due course... Why are you not sharing with me your compositions? I that case we can make some suitable corrections off and on."

"My verses could be full of mistakes. I am very hesitant to share it with Ayyá," I replied.

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"Don't have such reserve in future. You must recite your verses to me often." This nearly sounded like a directive from him. Thereafter I used to share some of my compositions occasionally. "Maybe if you rather express it in this manner it could be better still," he would say. Thanks to this practice I registered in my mind some of the aspects to be looked into in composing verses.

Bála Bodha Ilakkanam (Grammar):

One afternoon Master and I had gone to Kumbakonam and were in Thyágarája Chettiár's house. Chettiár requested that we stayed overnight in his house and leave for Patteeswaram the next day. We did so accordingly.

Thyágarása Chettiár stated that Bála Bodha Ilakkanam (Grammar for the Young) written by Visáka Perumál Iyer was marked by clarity and precision. "Could I study this text under Ayyá?" I asked. "Surely," replied Chettiár. As I did not have a copy of the book, Master requested Chettiár to lend me his copy. As he had possibly been using that copy as a reference over a long time, he did not agree to part with it. My teacher merely looked at the book for a while and returned it to him.

Next morning when I woke up from bed Pillaivál was not around. It was a normal practice for Pillaivál to wake me up in the morning and take me out. I was somewhat perturbed that he had left by himself so early in the morning. I could not figure out the reason. When I came out I saw him sitting on the thinnai. It was obvious that he had already completed his ritual observances of the morning. One Náráyanasámi Pillai, an Assistant Tamil Pundit in Kumbakonam college, was sitting with Pillaivál and chatting.

As soon as he saw me Master pointed out to the book in his hand and said, "Here is *Bála Bodha Ilakkanam* I got

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from him; so you can now study this text." My teacher had woken up very early in the morning, completed his ritual observances, gone to Náráyanasámi Pillai's house about half a mile away and obtained the book from him. I realized that he had done so because of Chettiár's refusal to part with his copy. I was touched by his gesture.

I immediately rushed out, completed my morning chores and started learning Bála Bodha Ilakkanam from Master. As I had already learnt Nannool Grammar text, I found value in this book as a Grammar text. I learnt the entire text twice over. In between Master appreciated the structure of the text and also dwelt upon the history of Visáka Perumál Iyer.

That morning we reached Patteeswaram.

Desire For a Job:

We would go to Kumbakonam off and on and spend time with Thyágarása Chettiár. Chettiár himself would come to Patteswaram during holidays. On those occasions Ārumugatthá Pillai 's house in Patteeswaram used to be full of life. While Chettiár had a rigorous manner of speaking there was always sparkle in it. His visits enlivened Pillaivál and me.

With our frequent meetings, I became closer to Thyágarása Chettiár. He believed in expressing his views in a forthright manner without putting on a façade of bonhomie; this helped me develop a stronger bond with him. I realized that he was held in high esteem because he was a teacher in a college and was a fine intellectual. When we stayed in his house in Kumbakonam I noticed many dignitaries calling on him and the way he moved with them. This bore witness to his prestige. Thanks to his job he could

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maintain his dignity without the need to seek favours from others. At the same time I had noticed with sadness that Pillaivál had to depend upon others for support. Comparing the two situations I developed a concern that I too may get reduced to a state of dependency.

As this feeling emerged I started thinking that a regular job would rid me of the constant financial worries. I had once told Thyágarása Chettiár, "It would be very beneficial if you could find a job for me in a school. I can do the teaching and continue to study under Ayyá during spare time." "Let's see when such an opportunity arises," Chettiár had replied. Pillaivál was not aware of this.

In My Interest:

During a visit to Patteeswaram Thyágarása Chettiár told me, "Three dignitaries including Rão Bahadur Appu Shásthrigal are planning to start a school in Kumbakonam named Native High School. All the three of them are attached to me. They have asked me to look for a suitable person as Tamil Pundit. I immediately thought of you. Initially the monthly salary would be fifteen rupees. It can increase later." On hearing this I was inclined to accept the job. We appraised Pillaivál of this development.

He kept quiet for a while. It was obvious that many thoughts were crisscrossing in his mind. Then he looked at Chettiár. "Thyágarásu, why such a hurry now itself? He has still not started his family life; he is studying enthusiastically. If he takes up a job now itself, he can't study with such zest; wouldn't find time to. Let him study for a few more years. Let's look at the job option later," Pillaivál said. While he had expressed his opinion without consulting me, I was sure he had said that only in my paramount interest. Chettiár too agreed with him. He told me, "What Ayyá says

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is correct. It is beneficial to study when one is young. In good time good jobs will come seeking you. Don't worry about it now. Study well under Ayyá."

I too thought over the matter. I realized that they had said so only with my interest at heart. I changed my idea.

Visit to Thiruchiráppalli:

During the Aippasi month of Shrimukhá year (October 1873) my teacher went to Thiruchiráppalli on some important work. I too went with him. Those days there was only one rail route - Nagappattinam to Thiruchiráppalli via Thanjávoor. So, to take the train, we had to go to Needámangalam lying between Nagappattinam and Thanjávoor. We travelled from Patteeswaram to Needámangalam in a cart. During the journey Master dictated thirty verses of Perunthurai section in Thiruperunthurai Puránam; I wrote them down.

We boarded the train at Needámangalam and reached Thiruchiráppalli. We stayed there for some time. As it was Pillaivál's place of birth many of his boyhood friends and other students flocked to his side. I enjoyed hearing off and on from my teacher about his boyhood days. In response to the request from the visitors, Master would ask me to read out the verses form *Thiruperunthurai Puránam* and explain the meaning. They would heap praise on him that his poetic prowess had been growing from strength to strength.

We visited the Saivite holy sites near Thiruchiráppalli. During this journey, each day, I could meet new persons and see new places. This provided me considerable pleasure, wiping out any trace of worry. Whenever we visited a holy site Master would explain in detail the glory of the deities in the temple and also the history of the site. I had a

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great time. What we could get only by reading many books and listening to many great savants - I could learn such rare things by merely listening to Master's narration. 'What a fine way to learn' I would rejoice. After a few weeks my teacher and I returned to Patteeswaram.

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56. THE VERSES I COMPOSED

At the request of Ayyásámi Pillai, a disciple of my teacher and a Tamil pundit in Thanjávoor Marshall College and Ilakkanam Rámasámy Pillai and a few others, Master went to Thanjávoor and stayed there for a month. As directed by him I spent that period in Utthamadánapuram with my parents. As my uncle's income was inadequate the family was under severe financial strain.

If the family situation had to improve, my Father has to wander from place to place and raise some income with his musical skills. How long can he toil like this? I realized that I should also make some contribution either by getting employed or by raising some income by other means. Mere wish is no solution.

A Verse for Paddy:

When I was living in other places I was not fully aware of my family's predicament. Only when I encountered it in person, I was filled with anguish that I had been of no material benefit to my family. When I thought of what I could do in this matter, only one course appeared open to me.

In the Vellaippillayámpettai village, nearby there was a rich landlord by name Ayyákkannu Moopanár. He was a very influential person in those parts. I knew that he was fond of my father. I approached him, recited a verse I had composed seeking some paddy, and also explained its meaning. It was the first verse I had composed, seeking material help from anyone. He was happy on hearing my

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composition and sent four 'kalams' [about sixteen litres] of paddy to my house. My parents were pleased. I do not remember that verse now.

Homage to Goddess of Learning:

As my teacher was then in the process of composing Thiruperunthurai Puránam, my mind was full of his poetic finesse. I also got involved in composing verses. As I had leisure time during my stay in Utthamadánapuram, I tended to compose a lot of verses. I composed many verses of '*Thanippádal*' genre - occasional poetry in single stanzas. My uncle chided me that I should be composing something more worthwhile.

Firstly, I started composing verses in praise of the Goddess of Learning. As I dictated the verses my uncle was good enough to write them down. My work included some *Vennpás* and a few '*Kattalai Kalithurai*'.

Ullak kavalai yelámuraith thenuk kuvandharula
Mellak kavinana meedhivarth thevara velaiyidha
Kallak kayavark karumamu thekalaik Karpagame
Vallak kamala malarmeedhil vázhu Manonmaniye.'

(Goddess Manonmani,
Seated on a lotus boat
Out of bounds for the base,
Unfailing nectar for the devout!
Unburdened have I all my woes
Time to lavish your blessings
Coming ever so gracefully
Riding your lovely swan.)

This was one such verse. I used to get thrilled when I was involved in this effort. My uncle also complimented

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me occasionally.

Thiruveraga Málai:

Then I composed sixteen Kattalai Kalithurai pieces in honour of Lord Murugá of Swámimalai. These verses contained no sublime philosophical thought or poetic fancy. My experience was limited and my practice meagre. These limitations influenced the depth of these verses.

I had been scarred by many sorrows. So, in my entreaties to Lord Shanmugá of Thiruveragam my yearning to be relieved of these sorrows was prominently present.

Ádum aravirkku nerágach cheerum avaraiyagan
Reedon radiyar galodenru mevi yiruppavarull
Nádu miruvar thamakkari yánaru nádhathuyar
Sádumpunarponni soozhthiru veraga Shanmugane

(Thiruveragam* - Swámimalai)

(*O Shanmugá of Thiruveragam*
Embraced by Ponni rich in water!
Unfailing saviour of supplicants
From miseries galore!
Seek do I thy benediction
To accept me ever among your devotees
To spurn the vile
Hissing around me
Like dancing cobras.)

As I thought of Ārumugatthá Pillai also when I was composing lines in honour of Lord Shanmugá (i.e., Árumugá), the sentiments expressed in those verses reflected the darts of agony generously hurled by Ārumugatthá Pillai.

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Ānandavalli Pancharatnam:

While writing down these verses, my uncle suggested that I could compose poems on the goddess in our village temple. Accordingly I composed five verses under a title 'Ānandavalliammai Pancharatnam'.

Apart from composing verses, I used to explain the meaning of those verses to whoever came to my house. They used to enjoy it. Whether they enjoyed it or not was not of much consequence to me; it gave me satisfaction. During the one month I spent in Utthamadánapuram my parents and others concerned about my welfare felt, 'Not bad; this boy would definitely come up in life.'

My Pride Crushed:

One Seshu Iyer used to live in Utthamadánapuram; he was an elderly relative of mine and was well trained in Tamil and music. It was a practice those days for Tamil vidwáns to test the ability of any student of Tamil they came across. The students would not get annoyed by such intrusive examination. When I was chatting with Seshu Iyer he subjected me to a lot of questions. 'I am studying under a very distinguished savant. I also compose poetry.' With this feeling of self-importance, I replied his questions with studied disdain.

He was very familiar with Kamba Rámáyaná. He recited a verse and told me, "Do you know the meaning of this verse? Come on, let's see." I could well have told him that I had not studied Kamba Rámáyaná. But, with exaggerated self-assurance, I looked closely at the verse and thought that it may not be beyond my reach. That verse was from the '*Varunanai Vazhivendu Padalam*', in the *Yuddha Kándam*. Rámá is described as asking Varuná to give him

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passage across the sea. Rámá gets angry that Varuná had not appeared and shoots an arrow at the sea. Varuná comes trembling, bows to Lord Rámá and prays for forgiveness.

"Páyirul seekkun dheivap paridhiyaip pazhikku málai
Áyirankaraththán mannmae ladiyuraiyága vaithu
Theeyana siriyor seidhár porupadhu periyor seigai
Áyira námath thaiyá saranamendra diyil veezhndhán.

[The Varuná that mocked
The Sun, the divine dispeller of darkness
Fell at Lord's feet
Placing garlands thousand
With jewels dazzling
Implored he
'When petty ones blunder
Should not the great pardon?
Salutation unto you, O Lord
Adorned by thousand names!)

The gist of the verse is as follows: Varuná brought many bejewelled garlands, placed them at Lord Rámá's feet, and prostrated at his feet pleading, " If lesser ones commit a misdeed, the great should grant pardon. My salutations to thee."

I started giving my own meaning to the verse: 'The thousand-handed Varuná placed as offering a garland with a splendour that mocks the divine sun which dispels the darkness around....' At this point Seshu Iyer interjected and asked me, " Stop at this point. You have referred to Varuná with a thousand hands. Where is it mentioned in the verse?"

"The verse talks of Áyiram Karathán", I replied.

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With a gentle smile he asked, "Is there any authority anywhere that Varuná had thousand hands?'

"This itself is the authority, " I replied.

"Did your teacher tell you so?"

"What is wrong in what I said? Tell me that first."

"The word 'thousand' should not be connected to the word 'hand' in parsing the verse and constructing its meaning. The word 'thousand' should be connected to the word 'garland'; on this basis the verse should mean that he brought a thousand garlands and placed them on the ground. You see, you've been somewhat hasty in your interpretation." The bubble of my pride got pricked. 'Without realizing what intellectual prowess resides in a person, I have been disrespectful to him out of my lack of discernment.' Then I told him in genuine modesty, " I constructed the meaning myself. I have not yet learnt this text from my teacher. I realize that your interpretation appears to be proper."

"One should think before expressing a thought. But I am indeed happy that you came forward to express the meaning of the verse without any inhibition." He also blessed me.

A few weeks later Master came to Patteeswaram from Thanjávoor. He sent Hariharaputhra Pillai to look me up. He enquired about my welfare and left. I reached Patteeswaram in a few days.

Backbiting and Problems:

My teacher told me something totally unexpected. I was shocked to hear it. "After I returned from Thanjávoor I visited Thiruvávaduthurai. Someone had apparently carried tales against you to Sannidánam. He had told San-

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nidánam that you had complained against Sannidánam to me, caused me anguish, and this has made me come away and stay here. Sannidánam had believed this story and been somewhat cross with you. 'Sáminátháyyar never told me any such things. He is also not made that way', I told him and pacified him. A place of esteem like the Mutt does attract some scandalmongers. Some persons tend to be taken in by such stories. As Sannidánam has a natural affection towards you, he was appeased by my explanation. It would be helpful if you also acted in a manner to Sannidánam's total satisfaction." 'How terrible! What to do to meet this situation?' I despaired. Master also thought over the matter and composed one *Viruttham* and also a keerthaná in a Western music tune, both in honour of Subramanya Desikar. He then told me, "When you go next to Thiruvávaduthurai you better recite these pieces to Sannidánam musically; this would help remove even some residual anger in him. Please commit them to memory." Accordingly I memorized the two pieces and rehearsed singing them in appropriate tune.

Keerthaná:

After a few days we went to Thiruvávaduthurai. The first thing I did on seeing Subramanya Desikar was to render musically the Viruttham and keerthaná composed by my teacher. The pallavi of the 'English Note' ran like this:

Thunganchár Tharuthurai sayilvalar
Subra mania Dhayá Nidhiyae
Thundrum perarulnani pozhitharu
Sutthamei gnána kalánidhiyae

(Subramayá, the benevolent
Of Thuraisai esteemed
Of fame ever expanding!

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Paragon of solicitude
Showering grace immense!
Repository of spiritual wisdom pristine!)

As the keerthaná was somewhat long, I sang it in a measured way and to the best of my ability. Desikar was very pleased to hear the keerthaná. The persons in the Mutt also rejoiced it with 'encore' demands. The Odhuvárs also memorized the keerthaná and started singing in Subramanya Desikar's presence everyday. There was no trace that Desikar was ever upset with me. As usual, he was very supportive of me.

Pillaivál's Treasure Chest:

Subramania Thambirán had written to Desikar that the formal launching of Thiruperunthurai Puránam should occur early. Desikar informed Pillaivál accordingly. My teacher kept saying that the launch should begin pretty soon. Only a few *Padalams* (Chapters) had been completed by then. I was under an impression that the launch could occur only after the entire Puránam had been composed.

Only later did I come to know about Pillaivál's practice. He was not governed by the norm that the entire text should have been composed before the formal launch. While still composing the latter section of the 'Puránam', he would formally launch the earlier sections. Sometimes he would complete one section in the morning and launch it the same afternoon. When a treasure chest is brimming with money, one could draw any amount, any time; likewise, his treasure trove of Poetry was always full and he could draw poems as he pleased. The only point was that he should have the requisite enthusiasm, which was the key to that treasure trove. When this condition was present, nobody could stop the torrent of poetry from him. ◈

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57. THIRUPPERUNTHURAI

The sacred Thiruvádirai date in Márkazhi month was approaching. My teacher had decided to go to Thirupperunthurai for Thiruvádirai darshan and return after completing the formal launch of the Puránam. He took leave of everyone and left in December 1873. Saverinátha Pillai joined us from Máyuram. Some other students also came. Subramania Desikar had sent Pazhani Kumára Thambirán as the Mutt's representative.

We Set Out:

We all set out together. We stayed in Thiruvidaimarudur and then reached Thirupperunthurai via Kumbakonam, Thanjávoor and Pattukkottai. When we reached there we found that many scholars and Shivá devotees had already arrived there for Árudrá Darshan.

Everyone was delighted to see Pillaivál. The temple authorities received the Poet Maestro with instrumental music, offered him prasádam and escorted him for darshan. Subramania Thambirán received him at the temple. That day Mánikkavásagar's icon was decorated in his ministerial attire.

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Formless Idol:

I witnessed something unique in Thirupperunthurai, not encountered in other holy sites. In the Shivá temples Shivá in Lingá form and the Devi in Ambikai form are installed in the sanctum-sanctorum. In that holy site both Shivá and Ambikai are formless. Only altars are consecrated in the sanctum-sanctorum. The tradition is that Swami and Ambikai are in their formless manifestation. Poojá and other forms of worship are conducted only to these altars.

The Lord's sacred name is Áthmanáthar and Ambikai is named Shiva Yogámbikai. My Teacher celebrated the formless elegance of the true deities in the following verse:

"*Thooyanám maththaruva muruvamavai yeninumoru*
Thondral pondre
Páyaná nilavaraippin kanumamarvá lenaltheritha
Padiye pola
Áyaná dhankadantha vármadhá dhak kadavul
Amardharkkerppa
Meyanáyaki Sivayogámbigaithan viraimalarthál
Mevi vázhvám".

The meaning of the verse runs on these lines:

Wherever and whenever
Lord Shivá appears in a
Defined form or formless
Devi Ambikai also presents
Herself in a like manner.
Here, Lord Atmanátha
Appears in formless glory,
Beyond the pale of
Melodic principle. Devi
Shivayogámbikai too

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Manifests Herself likewise.
Let us lose ourselves in
Devout surrender unto
Her!

Mánikkavásagar:

As the great Saivite saint Mánikkavásagar had received spiritual initiation at that holy site and as Lord Shivá performed a few Thiruvilaiyádals or sportive acts of benediction or retribution there, special poojás and festivals are conducted there in honour of Mánikkavásagar. He occupies the pride of place in these festivals.

Mánikkavásagar received spiritual initiation under the Kurundhá tree, which is deified as the 'Sthala Virukshá (the sacred tree associated with a holy site). Lord Shivá is consecrated there; he is also called as Gurumoorthy, the God Mentor. For the sake of Mánikkavásagar Shivá played the role of a horse-assistant. As a mark of this tradition, the God consecrated in a mandap called Kanagasabai located in the third Prákáram (paved way around the sanctum-sanctorum) of the temple, appears on horse-mount. The place is called Horse Swami Mandap. The form of Mánikkavásagar appears in different parts of the temple. Mánikkavásagar shrine is located in front of the Ambikai shrine. Six times a day poojá and other forms of worship are conducted simultaneously in both the shrines.

There is another special feature in this temple, not seen in the other temples. There is a convention in Shivá temples to have a darshan of Nandi Devá(the Sacred Bull) and enter the temple with his permission, then have the darshan of the main deity, and to offer worship to Chandeshwará as a part of leave-taking. That temple does not contain these two icons. It is a practice that those who come to offer worship

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have a darshan of Mánikkavásagar both while entering and on leaving the temple after worshipping the main deity.

Many endowments had been established in this temple by the States of Pudukottai and Ramanathapuram and by benefactors such as Pachaiappa Mudaliár.

Offerings and Other Paraphernalia:

Apart from the normal offerings at the other Shivá temples the following additional offerings are made at this temple: rice obtained from purboiled paddy, bitter gourd-tamarind curry and fried and seasoned greens.

The lamp illuminations at this temple were famous. The lamps would be burning all through the nights.

It is said that the priests who offer worship to Lord Natarájá in Chidambaram are three thousand in number. Tradition has it that they are called Thillai Moováyiravar (Thillai or Chidamabram 3000) and that Lord Shivá himself is one of them. There is a similar tradition in Thi ruperunthurai also. The priest in this temple belongs to Three Hundred Group. Puráná says that there were 300 priests during ancient days and that Áthmanátha Swámi was one of them.

Nowadays the priests who worship the Lord and his Consort are called Nambiárs; their poojá follows the Vedic tradition. The worship of Mánikkavásagar is conducted under Saiva Ágama format.

Veerabadrar:

There is a shrine for Veerabadrar at the entrance of the Goddess Ambikai temple. As per the puráná he had destroyed the Yága sacrifice of Daksha, and protects Ambikai's yogá in the same form, and she has been installed there at Lord Shivá's order. It is believed that propitiating

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that icon would cure persons possessed by the devil and various other inflictions.

Sculptures:

The temple houses many exquisite sculptures. Those involved in the art of sculptures identify some specific pieces in specified places as remarkable sculptures difficult of replication. 'Thirupperunthurai Kodungai' is one such rare piece. There are also many pieces of rare dexterity including whole stone chains.

Scholars Arrive:

Thanks to these special attributes this holy site is greatly hailed by Shivá devotees. When we went there for Thiruvádirai darshan many devotees there were my Teacher's admirers.

Vandrondar Chettiár from Devakottai, 'Siledai Puli' (Pun Maestro) Pichu Iyer from Vembathur, Subbu Bhārathiār from Singavanam and Krishna Iyer from Manalmerkudi had come. They were all greatly delighted on seeing Pillaivál.

After darshan at the temple we retired to the places assigned for our stay. Vandrondar and others came to my Teacher and were engaged in lively discussions.

Vandrondar was a grain merchant, and was visually challenged. He was a staunch Shivá devotee and was meticulous in observing ritual practices. A Tamil scholar. A person of amazing memory. Had studied under Pillaivál and Árumuga Návalar; had a penchant to study everything deeply and to understand everything lucidly. Had considerable respect for Pillaivál.

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Pichu Iyer belonged to the Sozhiar sect of Vembathur; an extempore poet. Had a capacity to compose verses on any subject, much to the amazement of the listeners. Even when I first met him at Thiruperunthurai, his capacity to compose verses in a jiffy, filled me with surprise.

Singavanam Subbu Bharathiár belonged to a Brahmin family with a long line of Tamil scholars. Had studied under Pillaivál for a number of years. Well-versed in Tamil grammar and literature. Could conduct discourses with a musical rendition of verses and regale the audience. From the way he spoke I could readily discern his skills. I was captivated by his method of reciting verses.

Manalmerkudi Krishna Iyer was a good Tamil scholar. Was well-versed in composing verses and in literary research. Had composed many Prabandams.

Pichu Iyer and Subbu Bhárathi read out to Pillaivál a few Prabandams composed by them. They readily accepted and incorporated the corrections suggested by Teacher, and also obtained from him special forewords.

Árudrá Darshan:

The Gurumoorthy Darshan on the Thiruvádirai Day was an enchanting sight. That day we looked with admiration at Subramania Thambirán's administrative ability. The meticulous arrangements made one wonder if that holy site derived its esteem from Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam or it was the other way round. Those who went there generally stayed there for a few days and enjoyed the darshan. Perfect arrangements had been made to take care of the devotees congregating from different places.

An auspicious day was fixed for the formal launch of Thiruperunthurai Puránam. I was writing the verses as dictated by Teacher.

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'Shivagurunátha Pillai':

Though a Christian, Saverinátha Pillai always wore holy ashes on his person. No one in Thirupperunthurai had known him as a Christian. In the company of Shivá devotees there, he was also one more Shivá devotee. Would not join the Saivites during the common food service. One could not find any difference between him and the Saivites n appearance, manner of speaking and habits. Even so, his name Saverinátha Pillai kept flagging his Christian origin. He wanted to adopt a Saivite name.

A few days after landing in Thirupperunthurai, he kept sharing this desire with Teacher. He told him, "Everything around here is all Saivite. I'm also very much like the others here. But my name strikes a discordant note. I want to adopt a Saivite name. During the formal lauch of the Puránam, Ayyá Avargal would happen to call me to attend to some matters. In a congregation of Shivá devotees, if Ayyá calls me by my Christian name to attend to some matter, those assembled could find it odd."

"I understand. Hereafter I am inclined to call you by a new name Shivagurunátha Pillai. Doesn't it also sound like your old name?" With these words he re-christened him. At this, Saverinátha Pillai's joy knew no bounds.

Saverinátha Pillai came running up to me. "Look here, from today I am indeed a full Saivite. Better forget my old name. I am now Shivagurunáthan. Did not Ayyá change your Vaishnavite name into Sáminátha? I have also received a similar blessing. Ayyá has changed my Christian name into Shivagurunáthan. This is a sure indication how Ayyá treats us both alike and lavishes his affection on us. Don't these two names have the same meaning? What is Sáminátha? And what again is Shivagurunáthan? Both are

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the same." He said this with evident satisfaction.

I was pleasantly surprised at Teacher's action and was pleased with my colleague's joy.

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58. MY FEVER

The formal launch of the Puránam commenced in Thiruperunthurai on an auspicious date. Subramania Thambirán had made elaborate arrangements in this regard. Dignitories, scholars and Shivá devotees from other places had assembled in large numbers.

The launch was conducted in the Horse Swámi Mandap. I started musically reading the verses. While I had had experience in reading verses musically on other occasions, it was the first time I read the verses before such a large gathering. But I was not afraid of the crowd; it only gave me a new bout of enthusiasm.

Formal Launch:

The launch occurred during the afternoons, mostly till five in the evening. It would take longer on some days. As the visitors often called on Pillaivál and were engaged in lively discussions with him, Teacher had no rest even during the non-launch hours.

Only a few hours of the Puránam had been composed. As the launch continued on daily basis, it was necessary to keep composing new verses. But Teacher did not appear unduly bothered by this demand. Lot of time was spent in his discussions with the visitors.

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Verses already composed had been launched. No new verses were ready for the next day's launch. I flagged this matter with Teacher a couple of days earlier. He casually said, 'Well, let's see', but appeared unconcerned about it.

'It would perhaps be easy enough for him to compose verses in the morning and launch them in the afternoon. But, where is the time in the mornings? People keep coming in the mornings too for discussion. How is he going to get the time and the leisure to compose verses? Maybe it would be necessary to suspend the launch for a couple of days.' So I thought.

Amazing Event:

The next day dawned. As usual, a few people had come for discussions with Teacher. 'If they keep blabbering, there is no way out. There is no way we can have a launch session this afternoon.' I was getting angry with the visitors who kept talking with Teacher.

After a while Teacher asked me to bring palm-leaves and stylus. I brought them and sat by his side. 'Good, he has remembered it at least now'. I was glad and expectant. I thought he would give leave to the visitors and start composing the verses.

What I expected did not happen. Even in the presence of the visitors, the great poet started composing and dictating the verses. The visitors were overwhelmed at the free flow of verses from him. He was speaking to them off and on and also continued to dictate the verses. While I had moved with him for so long I had never witnessed a marvel like this. While writing down the verses I was astonished at how the great poet could spin out verse after verse surcharged with poetic imagination, while continuing to be

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engaged in lively conversation. Even '*Ashtávadánis*' practising multi-tasking simultaneously would deal with only a few verses. But, Teacher was here composing a whole Puránam. How poetic imagination could surge within him in the midst of a crowd of interlocutors overawed me.

In due course I came to understand the workings of the great poet's mind. His mind was a seed-bed of poetry. Whenever he was full of spirit there was a spontaneous joy of creativity. While discussing with friends he was full of that kind of spirit. There was no space in the joyous realm for petty concerns such as debt and difficulty. Shorn of such worries fancies took to their wings.

After composing and dictating the verses meant for launch that afternoon Pillaivál started attending to his afternoon poojá and related matters. The visitors also took leave. Since that day composing verses in the morning and launching them in the afternoon became the routine.

Research on the Puránás:

Teacher wanted to deal with Mánikkavásagar's history in his Thirupperunthurai Puránam. So he was researching on Sanskrit and Tamil texts dealing with the Saivite saints' history and collecting necessary materials. He requested the Sanskrit scholars there to read out and explain the two Sanskrit texts, i.e., *Ádhi Kailása Maháthmiyam* and *Manivachana Maháthmiyam*. Ádhi Kailásam is another name for Thirupperunthurai. He made me read aloud old Tamil Puránams related to Thirupperunthurai, *Thiruvádhavooradigal Puránam* and *Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam* and formulated in his mind how he should delineate Mánikkavásaga Perumán's history in his Puránam.

For some time I was involved only in writing down what teacher dictated and to read aloud those verses during

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the launch. As I was playing the role of amanuensis, I could not find the time to study any new book. Even so I derived a lot of benefit from the research involved in the study of Saint Mánikkavásagar's life. By reading Tamil Puránam text I could get more benefit than by studying them in a class format.

Fever and Tumour:

I did not play the role of amanuensis for long. My misfortune intervened. I developed fever. I was also troubled by a tumour in the stomach. Loose motions also set in.

Initially I thought that it was one of those common fevers. Evidently I was in the grip of a particularly inauspicious period in my life; the ailment was indeed severe. I had to stop writing down the verses dictated by Teacher and reading out the verses during the formal launches. I was completely bedridden.

Teacher's Sadness:

Ever since he came to Thirupperunthurai, Teacher was in fine spirits. His lively conversations with many friends and the effusive attention he received there, were the causes. As he was in the midst of aficionados heaping genuine praise on him, he had no time to brood over his other troubles.

In the meanwhile my sickness disturbed his peace. I thought my bad luck was a cause. But, Teacher had a different take on the situation: "The demon afflicting the Pipal tree has got hold of Lord Pillaiyár seated under the tree; likewise my misfortune seems to infect those associated with me."

When the formal launch was not in progress he would sit by my side and take care of me. He arranged for prop-

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er physicians to examine me and prescribe remedies. An admirer of his and a police inspector in the area, Sri Sattainátha Pillai procured some good medicines. But the severity of the fever would not relent.

Because of the sickness one Periyannam Pillai wrote down the verses as Teacher dictated. During the launch the reading of the verses was being done by Saverinátha Pillai bearing the new name Sivagurunátha Pillai. Everyone could observe Pillaivál's anguish over my sickness. Everyday Saverinátha Pillai would recount to me what happened at the launch. Pillaivál also would brief me.

One day a message was received by Subramania Thambirán from Subramania Desikar enquiring about the progress of the Arangetram. That day Teacher told me, "Sannidánam has sent a message to 'Kattalaisámi'. Has enquired about the Arangetram. He has stated in the message that Sáminátha Iyer's reading the verses must be very satisfying. If he gets to know about your sickness he would be very sad."

After I joined Pillaivál, this was my third bout of sickness. This period is more important than the two earlier occasions. It stopped me from participating in the Arangetram festival. My sickness grew in intensity. Occasionally I lost my consciousness due to high fever. Teacher and others got very concerned. I realized that my continued stay there would cause a lot of inconvenience to everyone around. So I told my guru that I would go to my village, take medicines and return after I get well.

He was very sad on hearing this. He told me in anguish, "Lord Shivá seems to be testing us too much. When you are well you extend all assistance to me. Now that you are unwell I am sending you to your village. I am not in a

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position to alleviate your misery. What would your mother and father think of me?"

"Ayyá should not have any such concern. They are fully aware of the great affection Ayyá has been lavishing on me."

Back to Utthamadánapuram:

He made all the necessary arrangements and sent me to Utthamadánapuram. Just to be of assistance to me he sent with me his student Vennpáppuli Velusámi Pillai. He arranged with Subramania Thambirán to give me ten rupees towards expenses. Most reluctantly I left Ávudaiyár Kovil and reached Utthamadánapuram.

My parents were then in Utthamadánapuram. Káthán of Gopurájapuram, a reputed native physician in those parts examined my health. He identified the 'fever-tumour' and administered appropriate medicines; Sanga Dhrávagam was the potion prescribed. The tumour slowly started dissolving. Fever also subsided. I felt grateful to Káthán.

Family Situation:

I reached Utthamadánapuram at the beginning of Másí month in Srimukha Year (February 1874). I underwent treatment there for a month. I spent time reading the texts I had studied under Pillaivál.

The landlords in the neighbourhood were sending paddy out of affection towards me and my father. Even so the family situation was quite precarious. A loan of 150 rupees in connection with my wedding also remained unpaid. That worry also aggravated the situation. While the bodily ailment was gradually wearing off, the mental anguish over the family burden kept increasing. Till then I had not shouldered any family responsibility. Father was also getting de-

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jected. My uncle was reeling under the weight of the family burden.

I thought it was improper that I am doing nothing for the family in this situation. I was increasingly convinced that I should be doing my bit in removing the family's burden of debt. 'I have come away from Pillaivál; should I not be going back to him? Shouldering the family burden would ever remain. I should not let go the valuable opportunity of improving my Tamil learning under my great Teacher.' This thought also occupied my mind. Even so the thought which prevailed was this: 'If I am a debtor so is my Teacher. If I could somehow relieve my family of its debt, I could go back to him and continue my studies as before. I should not allow the family debt to be snowballing.'

My Disappointment:

One day I went to Kumbakonam and saw Thyágarája Chettiár. I requested him to find a job for me. "I am planning to take a month's leave. Can you work as my substitute during this period?" he asked me. "I will," I replied, possibly with unbecoming assurance. "Ok. I will talk to Mr.Gopala Rao," he replied. I was elated at his response. But the idea didn't work out. "He is still too young. Let us revisit the matter later." Gopala Rao sealed the issue. I returned disappointed.

My parents and I thought that it would be better to move to Sooryamoolai; at least the food requirements could be taken care of there. Accordingly my parents and I moved there during the Panguni month. As my health had not recovered fully I could not travel from place to place and try to generate some income. At the same time I was in the grip of the worry about the family debt.

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Father's Suggestion:

Father had a suggestion: "If we could go to places like Chenganam and deliver discourses on Puránams, we may come by some money, and try to settle the debt." This advice was based on his own experience. He thought that I could travel in those parts and deliver discourses and derive some benefit, as he had indeed done in the past. He had a hope. This earlier thought of his could get fulfilled then and the family tradition continued.

This sounded as a good idea to me. Would it not be easier to continue with the family tradition in a familiar environment rather than find a new job in a new place amongst new people? I had known the helpful nature of the people in places like Chenganam. I knew too that discourses on Tamil works would earn respect and money. A life-long engagement in Puráná discourses would earn divine blessings, fame and monetary gain.

All this sounded fine but, does it mean that my Tamil learning should come to an end? I have been blessed with the great Pillaivál's affection and have also earned the privilege of close acquaintance with the Thiruvávaduthurai Mahá Sannidánam. Is it proper that I renounce all this and be running from place to place? Would the great Lord condemn me to such a situation?

My mind was in a whirl. I decided that it was important to rescue my family from the stranglehold of debt, and told my Father that we could go to Chenganam. On hearing this, his satisfaction knew no bounds. There were two-fold reasons for his joy: we may find a way to wipe this debt, and his eagerness to visit the many places so close to him.

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59. DISCOURSES ON THIRUVILAIYÁDAL

My parents and I set out to Chenganam during the Vaikási month of Sri Mukha year(June 1873). We first went to Ariyiloor, halted there briefly and met Sadagopa Iyengár. He warmly enquired about Pillaivál's welfare and his work. Many old friends of Ariyiloor looked us up.

Events at Chenganam:

We reached Chenganam via Kunnam. Viruddácha-la Reddiár and other old friends were delighted to see us there. Reddiár was overjoyed to see me. News spread that 'Kunnam Iyer and his son have arrived'. Those known to us came one by one and spoke to us with genuine warmth.

I then noticed something which had been absent when we lived there earlier. I had earned a special esteem as a student of Pillaivál. Everyone kept speaking effusively about Pillaivál's vast erudition and his poetic genius. They derived a satisfaction and pride that a boy known to them was studying under him. I should include our family friends there among those genuinely interested in my progress.

Much like a woman visiting her parental home with an excellent name she had earned in her in-law's home, I was received with affection and esteem. Whenever I dwelt on Pillaivál's greatness, all of them listened to it in rapt at-

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tention. Whenever I recited rare verses of Pillaivál and expatiated on their meaning, they were all truly elated at my Teacher's great erudition and the benefit I had derived as his student.

During my earlier visits I was a mere footnote to my father. All visitors would lavish attention on him and enjoy listening to his music. The situation had changed. At that point I was in the forefront paling my father's presence. The friends there were busy speaking to me and learning a few new things from me. They would often compliment my father - 'It is all the benediction flowing from Senior Iyer's poojás.' This showed the high regard and affection they had for my Father.

I recited to Viruddáchala Reddiár many verses from the texts composed by Pillaivál such as '*Vátpokki Kalambagam*'. He avidly wrote down those verses in palm leaves, with the thrill of having unearthed a rare treasure. I also mentioned to him that I had informed Pillaivál about my learning Kárigai lessons from him and how it had been embedded in my memory. He was truly pleased to hear this.

The Test of Kalládam:

We spent time together luxuriating in discussions about Tamil texts. While Reddiár and I were engaged in such a discussion one day, some scholars from neighbouring villages came to call on him. Being a part of the discussion, some of them complimented me. For some strange reason I could observe a trace of annoyance on Reddiár's face. Maybe he was inclined to humiliate me in their presence. I could feel that annoyance in the way he spoke and in the manner he interjected me with questions.

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All of a sudden he brought the Kalládam texts, pointed to a few verses and asked me to explain the meaning. During those days when Sangam Poetry was still not known, Kalládam remained the touchstone of a scholar's erudition. In fact, there was a saying warning against crossing swords with a Kalládam scholar. A few persons scattered over Tamil Nadu had studied Kalládam. Reddiár was one such.

As soon as he gave me the text I realized that he was inclined to discredit me. Showing off some superior erudition was farthest from my mind. While I had not studied Kalládam under my Teacher, I had the ability to delve into it, and explain the meaning. But, Reddiár did not want me to explain the *Kalládam* verses. I fulfilled his desire without any difficulty. "I don't know," I replied calmly. I did not want my reply to sully my Teacher's reputation in any manner. I hastened to clarify, "It is true that Pillaivál has published Kalládam but I have not yet studied it under him." Reddiár and a few of those present there were pleased with my answer. Later I learnt that some of them were somewhat dissatisfied with Reddiár's attitude.

Neeli Irattaimanimálai:

But Reddiár's affection towards us did not diminish one bit. It was a time when he was afflicted by a severe ailment. His eldest son told me, " You are the son of a devout Saivite. If you could compose and sing a devotional hymn on our family deity, it would be of benefit to my Father. Bowing down to his wish I composed an *Irattaimanimálai* verse on the family deity consecrated in Arulurai - a Durgá named Neeli. One of those hymns was as follows:

Kadalvái Varumamu dásanár potrak kavindrigazhum
Madalvái salasa madandhayar vázhndha manithavisin

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Adalvá yarulurai meviya Neeli yadipanindhor
Kedalvái piniyinai pozhndhay sadhávidhan kittuvare.

(*Neeli the mighty*
Seated on a ruby pew
At Arulurai,
Hailed by goddesses,
Ensconced on lotus flowers
Of lovely petals,
Venerated by Devas
Imbibing nectar from ocean -
Prostrate at Her feet
And
Rid will you be of diseases foul
Bliss will ever be yours.)

Viruddáchala Reddiár recited everyday the Irattaimanimálai composed by me. As requested by him I took lessons on texts such as *Nydatham* for his two younger sons Periyappu and Chinnappu. A few other boys also learnt lessons under me.

Journey to Kárai:

Viruddáchala Reddiár's eldest son Nallappa Reddiár used to treat us with sincere affection. Those days he extended a lot of assistance to us. We obtained our family requirements and lived there in comfort. While we had no problem in dealing with our food and related requirements, we could not get financial assistance to settle the family debt. I shared this concern with Nallappa Reddiár. He requested his friend and a wealthy landlord of Kárai (Krishnasámi Reddiár) to provide us some help, got his consent and sent us to Kárai.

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He was a part of Chinna Pannai (Minor Landlord) group of Kárai. Well-versed in Telugu and Tamil; was of gentle disposition. He examined ways of helping us. It was eventually decided that I should conduct discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam. He informed others in the village and obtained their support to this endeavour.

Puránam Discourses:

The discourse was commenced on an auspicious day. As it was my first such effort, I performed the discourse with considerable care and attention. At the break of dawn provisions such as rice and vegetables would land in my house. This pleased my mother no end. While they had received similar help and attention when my father used to perform discourses, my mother was particularly happy that I had earned them with my own effort. She would secure each item with a remark, 'All this earned by my child.'

Not bothered by any care, my father spent his time happily performing Shiva poojá and engrossed in other devout pursuits. I was satisfied and enthused that at last god had blessed me to be of help to my family.

Blessing of Rain:

Amidst all this happiness there was a nagging worry. When I commenced my discourses the entire area had been starved of rains. This had left the people dispirited. Krishnasámi Reddiár and a few others had informed the villagers and hoped to give me a good purse out of the contributions of everyone, at the conclusion of the discourse. With the bad failure of monsoon they hesitated to pressurize the villages. They were even doubtful of getting adequate support for the ongoing discourse. They thought of completing the discourses with the marriage of Meenákshi.

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Náttu Padalam was then in progress. I put my training in Tamil text and music to good use. I drew parallels from different texts I had studied and explained the meaning. The listeners would express surprise that I had studied so many texts.

It was my good fortune that, in the course of my discourse one day there was a heavy downpour drenching the ground and the people's hearts with joy. Whether or not it increased the produce in their fields, I reaped a rich harvest with the words I sowed. Word went round that there were rains because of the commencement of Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam discourse. My esteem shot up. Thereafter, the question of stopping or abridging the Puránam discourse did not arise.

The discourse was held in the Pillaiyár temple at the heart of the village. It was held from seven to ten in the night. Many people from the neighbouring villages also attended. The number increased after the rainfall. With increasing numbers the benefit we derived was also on the rise.

Listeners:

A lady by name Meenammál of the Reddiár community lived in that village. She was versed in *Vedánta Shástrá*; was a modest devout and benevolent person. She used to sit on the thinnai of our house and listen to my discourses. My mother sat along with her and enjoyed the discourses. Meeammál helped us in many ways.

During that period Sri Shankarácháriyár Swámigal of Kumbakonam Mutt was camping in Perumpuliyur. Two Shástris of his retinue had come to Kárai. On listening to my Puránam discourse they complimented me for explaining the meaning word by word during my presentation. All

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these incidents helped enthuse me in my youthful effort.

Pastime:

I spent my time during the day, reading Tamil text and in lively discussions with friends. I regaled Reddiár by reading out *Thiruvánaikká Puránam* and explaining its meaning. As he was well-versed in Telugu, he would refer to and explain the meaning of the verses in Telugu from texts such as *Vásu Charitram* and *Manu Charitram*. At his request I translated them in the form of Tamil verses. This greatly pleased him.

There was a native physician in the village who was well acquainted with *Vedánta Shástrá*. He used to come often and talk to me for a long time. The dignitaries from other villages used to talk affectionately with me during daytime and express the desire that I should visit their villages too.

Venganur:

One day one Thambu Reddiár from Venganur had come. He came in the lineage of Annámalai Reddiár who had patronized the monarch of poetry Thuraimangalam Sivaprákasa Swámigal. Sivaprákása Swámigal had dwelt on this benefactor in Prabandams such as Thiruvengai Ulá. While I had my esteem for Sivaprákása Swámigal during my early days, this respect shot up after I started moving with Pillaivál. Hearing my teacher lavish praise on this saint's poetic genius, I started treating this saint as god.

Thambu Reddiár explained to me the special features of the sculptures in Venganur temple. He narrated a number of stories in this respect: Annámalai Reddiár had this temple constructed with a number of sculptors; when the lead sculptor was working one day, Reddiár folded betel leaves dutifully and handed it over to him; touched by his gesture

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the sculptor dismantled some work already accomplished and re-did that portion with more dexterous sculptures. He suggested that I should make it a point to visit Venganur. I was also very much interested, but could not manage the time.

The Head of Vedántá Mutt:

One day the Head of Thuraiyoor Vedánta Mutt came to Kárai and stayed in Meenammál's house. I called on him. He was then taking Vedántá lessons for his disciples. Learning about me from his disciples, he stopped the lesson and spoke to me affectionately for a brief while. That Mutt Head was held in high esteem and was an accomplished person. Those around were surprised that he was gracious enough to stop the lesson and speak to me for a while. He blessed me by listening to my discourse one day.

So the days rolled on pleasantly.

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60. HUNGER SATISFIED AT AMBAR

While leaving Chenganam for Kárai I had borrowed from Viruddachala Reddiár *Bhágavatham*, *Kamba Rámáyanam* and *Thirukkural* texts. Only the Bhágavatham text was in the form of palm-leaf manuscripts. While at Kárai I spent the daytime joyously reading these texts as also the other books in my possession. The first Kándá and the tenth Kándá of Bhagavatham captivated my mind.

Krishnasámi Reddiár used to read the Telugu version of Bhágavatham and explain the contents. I could understand some other opaque portions of Tamil Bhágavatham with these supplementary inputs. The more I read Kamba Rámáyanam the more I got engrossed in it. While delivering discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam, I also drew from Kamba Rámáyanam duly explaining the meaning of those verses. This practice lent an edge to my understanding of Rámáyaná. I decided that on returning to my Teacher, I should somehow learn under him the entire Kamba Rámáyanam.

The Muslims of Kalathoor:

On some days I would visit nearby villages and look up those known to me. One day I went to Kalathoor. There were a few elderly Muslims there who had studied Tamil.

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While conversing with them I was amazed at the intensity of their love for Tamil. They fluently recited some rare stanzas from literary works such as Kamba Rámáyanam and *Harichandra Puránam*. The way they recited the stanzas highlighted their involvement in those pieces. As it was known that I had studied under Pillaivál, they used to flock to me. They lapped up what I said about my Teacher's poetic genius and aspects of his personality. Differences in religion and caste were no bar to their appreciation of Tamil. There was a greater depth and maturity in their savouring the Tamil nectar than my own.

The discourses continued. The public enthusiasm and support kept increasing by the day. My ability to deliver discourses got ever so stronger but there was a nagging anguish in my heart: my separation from my guru.

Letter to my Teacher:

I had written a letter to Pillaivál as I was leaving Sooryamoolai. I had mentioned about my departure to Chenganam. I wrote to him again on arriving at Kárai. I had written a verse at the top of that letter. Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam was fresh in my mind. It talks of Devi Meenákshi as the word and Lord Sundaresá as the meaning. This signifies the essential welding of word and meaning. My verse extolled my teacher as a beautiful combination of the two holy names Meenákshi and Sundaram.

The Sadness of Separation:

I had written in my letter that I had been delivering discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam and that I would return to study under him at the conclusion of the discourses. I expected a reply from him, but to no avail. I was wondering if he was angry with me for having been away for many

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months and whether he was not inclined to believe that I would return to him.

I remembered Master telling me on the very first day of our meeting, "Many persons come to study under me. They spend a few days or weeks and then perform the vanishing trick." At the thought that he might consider me as one more such student, I felt very sad. 'It is a mistake that I have come here. My staying away from him for so many months is not a mark of my true respect for him.' With these thoughts, the discourse at Kárai, the love lavished by the people there and the scenic beauty of the place paled into insignificance. What use all this! Even if it were heaven, does it have value sans my teacher's affectionate presence? The separation from Master scalded me and the whole place seemed arid.

While hundreds of people were lavishing affection on me, the absence of that one person loomed large. I was, of course, occupying a pedestal and delivering discourses. But it was no patch on the pleasure I derived by waiting on my teacher's lips with palm leaf and stylus in my hand and in performing different chores for him.

I started telling my father that I should complete the discourse-series soon and return to Pillaivál. Father wished to continue there for a few more months. He could even have thought that the Tamil learning I had already acquired was adequate for my living. He did not reject my idea; nor did he endorse it.

A Break in the Discourse:

The discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam came to an end. It was a practice those days that on the conclusion of a series of discourses, the last day would be celebrated as a

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festival and the scholar honoured with gifts. The persons in Kárai and in the neighbouring villages were ready to contribute their mite in this regard. Krishnasámi Reddiár was collecting contributions from everyone. It took a few days to complete this collection. So the discourse-series was stopped just short of the final section, and there was a break in the discourses.

Journey:

The non-receipt of a reply from Pillaivál kept bothering me. I seized the opportunity provided by the break in the discourses, left my parents in Kárai and set out to Thiruvávaduthurai to meet my Teacher. Observing my eagerness, my father didn't stop me. 'Better come back soon. It would not be proper to indefinitely postpone the conclusion of the Puránam,' he pleaded with me.

He is not there:

I don't remember when I left and how I walked my way to Thiruvávaduthurai. Like one possessed I left Kárai and stopped only on reaching Thiruvávaduthurai. Only on reaching its outskirts I regained my composure. I headed straight towards the Mutt. A friend of mine enquired about my welfare. I was in no mood for polite conversation. "Where is Pillaivál staying?" It was all that I could ask him.

I was startled when he replied that Pillaivál wasn't there. Then I happened to see a Thambirán. Before he could open his mouth I asked him, "Where is Pillaivál?" He replied that he had gone to Ambar.

As I had been away for more than ten months, everyone kept enquiring about my welfare. I met Kumárasámi Thambirán. He was delivering discourses on '*Sekkizhár Pillai Thamizh*' composed by Pillaivál. I learnt that, after the Ar-

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angetram at Thirupperunthurai, Teacher had gone to Pudukottai and other places, returned later to Thiruvávaduthurai, and that his sixtieth birthday was fittingly celebrated during the Panguni month of Bhava year. I further learnt that Master had gone to Ambar a week back in connection with the Arangetram of *Ambar Puránam* composed by him. I was in no mood to linger any longer in Thiruvávaduthurai. I rushed to Ambar.

Reaching Ambar:

Leaving in the morning I reached Ambar by afternoon. On the way I encountered a dignitary by name Velu Pillai. It was he who had commissioned the composition of Ambar Puránam by Pillaivál. On learning that Pillaivál was staying in Swargapurá Mutt, I went there. Master was having his post-lunch siesta.

I was hungry and tired, having had no food since morning and walked considerable distance. But, my hunger to see Master and speak to him far outweighed it. Velu Pillai, whom I had met on the way could discern from my face that I have not had any meal. He directed one of his assistants to make suitable arrangement for my food. The assistant told me that I could meet Pillaivál after my meal. I was in no mood to eat; I could think of eating only after having a word with Pillaivál.

Meeting after Separation:

Master opened his eyes. His benign and affectionate look landed on me.

"Is it Sáminátha Iyer?"

"Yes."

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No words were exchanged for a few minutes; we couldn't talk. The eyes did the talking. My eyes were tear-laden and blurred my vision.

"Are you well?" Teacher asked.

"I am," I replied. My voice was feeble. I stood like a culprit before him.

"You have been away for so long," said the guru.

How do I reply him? I told him that I had to stay away to be of some support to my indigent family and that I was grieving each day over my separation from him.

Velu Pillai's assistant interjected and said that I had not had my meal. Only then did I realize that I was hungry.

"Not had your meal? Why didn't you tell me earlier? First go and have your meal, "Teacher directed. I returned after a hurried meal.

Then we kept talking. The love that had remained dammed up for ten months broke loose in a torrent. The hunger of my heart was appeased. I learnt that Master had not been rid of his financial worries. I could guess that he had come there for the Arangetram of Ambar Puránam mainly with the hope of getting some monetary assistance.

His Worries:

I explained to him the noble qualities of the friendly people in Kárai and nearby villages. He listened to my words attentively. I could not make out what he had in mind. He asked me suddenly, "Can I come there?" This left me concerned. Maybe, his predicament made him look for benefactors any and everywhere.

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"Should Ayyá Avargal come there people there would be so utterly delighted. Though many of them there are poor, there is no wealth to equal their abundant affection. There are a few rich people like Viruddáchala Reddiár. While they have not had the privilege of seeing Ayyá Avargal, they have great respect for Ayyá Avargal and are eager to be his students. We live and thrive under your name."

Special Merits of the Holy Site:

That evening Pillaivál took me to the Shivá temple at that holy site. He explained about the icons and the sacred bathing places there. He told me that the Shivá temple had been constructed by Kochengha Cholan and that it is mentioned in Theváram. I also learnt that it was the place where a benefactor by name Chenthan had lived; he had been hailed in Divákaram and also by Poet Avvaiyár.

Learning and Teaching:

I learnt a few texts under Master for a few days in Ambar. The Arangetram of Ambar Puránam had not commenced. So I could go with Master to places like Kongu Ráya Nalloor and Sorgapuram. Apart from studying from Pillaivál, I also taught on *Sekkizhár Pillai Thamizh* and *Thiruvidaimarudur Ulá* to Velu Pillai's younger brother Kuzhanthai Velu Pillai.

Observing my teaching method Master told those nearby, "Thanks to his practice in delivering discourses on Puránás, Sáminátha Iyer is explaining everything very very lucidly."

Taking Leave:

I stayed in Ambar for ten days. Then I told my teacher that I would complete the Puránam discourse at Kárai and return. He was in no mood to give me leave; he didn't have

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the heart to stop me either. "Well, do proceed. But make sure you come back soon," he said. He gave me a rupee for my travel expense. He also wrote a letter to Krishnasámi Reddiár urging him to get the Puránam completed and send me back without delay. As was his practice, he composed a stanza on Krishnasámi Reddiár and wrote it at the top of the letter.

I took leave with considerable reluctance and returned to Kárai.

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61. REWARD FOR DISCOURSES

On reaching Kárai I felt an urge to complete the discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam as soon as possible. Some persons suggested that if I could wait a little longer they could manage to raise more money. I told Krishnasámi Reddiár that whatever had been collected should be good enough. When he saw the letter from Pillaivál he was filled with happiness. He kept reading the verse written on him by the great savant and treasured it as an undeserved boon. "Thanks to my association with you I have received the great honour of receiving a lovely little poem on me by the prince of poets. Where am I and where the great man! Even though not personally known to me he has written this so graciously. Would I get the honour and opportunity to have a darshan of this savant?"

Krishnasámi Reddiár's Affection:

Seizing this opportunity I told him, "He has ordered me to join him soon. He has also mentioned it in his letter to you." Reddiár's mind was all the time brimming with pride that Pillaivál had composed a poem on him and also written a special letter to him. He was not in a mood to register the purpose of the letter. When I explained, Reddiár was caught in a dilemma.

"Should you necessarily be going there? If you could only stay on here and deliver discourses on texts such as Rámáyanam and Bhágavatham, we would extend all assis-

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tance within our means. Will ensure that no care touches you. You could go to Pillaivál, spend a few days with him and return here. We are prepared to call on him and seek his approval. In fact, we have been planning to request him to come and spend time here and honour him suitably. And you have reached a point in life when you should be setting up your own family. You can have access to all comforts here. I'm sure your father would also be pleased with this arrangement. This is not merely my idea. All those who listened to your discourses would be very happy if you would agree to stay on here. All are eagerly asking me about the next text to be taken up." It was as much a minor speech as an earnest plea.

'His words appeared to echo Appá's wishes. Their love seemed to work as an obstacle to my plans'. This left me somewhat ruffled. I tried to explain my position as persuasively as I could: "I can never ever forget your affection and kindness. I would take lessons under Pillaivál for some more time and then return here. I am, after all, still young. If I do not learn valuable lessons at this stage I will have to regret it later. Pillaivál's greatness is not something that you are not aware of. Would it be proper to let go the great honour of learning under his feet? You are one of my genuine benefactors. Wishing me only good all the time. You should not think that I am rudely rejecting your request. I'm sure there will be an opportunity to fulfil your desire. But, now is the time for me to fulfil my own desire."

Reddiár was at a loss to counter my position. "Well, do as you wish. I'm able to see the rationale of your position." He reluctantly agreed with me.

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Conclusion of Puránam:

A suitable auspicious day was fixed for the conclusion of Thiruvilaiyádal Puranam discourses. A part of the final chapter 'Arjuna Padalam' had already been covered. The discourse-series had to be concluded with the latter portion of the final chapter.

At the appointed day the entire village had thronged at the discourse site. They had dismantled the modest 'pandal' erected in front of the Pillaiyár temple and erected a more spatial pandal. They decorated the pandal with bunches of tender coconuts, plantain trees, areca-nut branches, palm foliage, mango leaf festoons and tapestry from the temple car. There was an atmosphere of a major festival. The discourse started early evening. The *Arjuna Padalam* delineates scenes of great rishis like Vasishtá reaching Madurai after visiting many Shivá holy sites and propitiating Lòrd Somasundará of Madurai. After their poojá there is a portion in the final chapter in which the rishis pay obeisance to Lord Somasundará. This portion contains the most celebrated among the god's sixty-four sacred spots, couched in verses of haunting melody. Here is the first stanza of this portion:

Pozhiyodu pása márukeda, vása vanseipani
Konda vandasaranam
Vazhipadu thondar kondanilai kandu Vellimani
Mandru ládi saranam
Sezhiyanbi lindhi dádhapadi mári yádaltheli
Viththa sodhisaranam
Ezhukadal koovi Mámiyudan Mámanádavisai
Vitha vádhisaranam.

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(Surrender unto you, the Cosmos!
Who shouldered Indirá's sins
That brought him odium.
Surrender unto you, the Dancer Divine!
Dancing in ecstasy
In lovely Velliambalam
Heeding devotees pleas.
Surrender unto you, the Flame Effulgent!
Who danced with legs changed
To appease Pándiyá's Chezhian.
Surrender unto you, the Source Primordial!
Who created the Seven Seas
For your consort's parents
To bathe and rejoice.

There were six such stanzas. I recited these stanzas in different rágás and explained their meanings. The recall of the detailed stories covered earlier, and the suitable melody in which the verses were rendered moved the audience to tears.

Visible Agatthiar:

The Puránam has it that when the rishis were thus paying homage, Lord Somasundará materialized in person and graciously told them, "Your praise has pleased me a great deal." This is mentioned in the following verse:

'Enathudhiththa Vasittádhi yirudigalaik Kurumuniyai
Eridhe niba
Vanaththuraiyum Sivaperumáni Lingathin Moorthiyái
Vandhu nokki
Sinatthinaivend ragan thelindheer
Neer Seidha Poosai Thudi
Deivath thánam
Anaithinukku manaitthuyirkku Niraindhu

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Namak kánardham
Ájit trande

(Residing in Neerpavanam
Endowed with abundant honey
Materialized Lord Shivá
From sacred Lingá.
Set eyes on devout saints
Vasishtá and Agasthyá
Uttered words of grace:
'Shed have you animus
Your mind in tranquil poise,
Happy indeed am I
With your poojá
Devotion and temples.'

I was planning to inform those assembled that I was going to rejoin Pillaivál. I was looking for an appropriate opening in the discourse to mention about my great Teacher. I thought that this verse provided that opportunity. After explaining the meaning of the verse I ventured to dwell upon its special significance. "When the verse refers to rishis such as Vasishtá it encompasses all the rishis. While so, the author makes a special mention of Agasthiya rishi. Agasthiyar is as eminent as the great Vasishtá himself. He was a very devout Shiva bakthá; equal to Shivá. Over and above this, he has the honour of bestowing esteem to Tamil equal to Sanskrit. Paranjyothi Munivar who composed this section had realized that it would be a blasphemy if he had not made an honoured mention of Agasthiyá. The Tamil poets invariably bestow such honour on Agasthiyá. The Tamil savants deserve such valued attention. The visible Agathiyá of today is my honoured Teacher Pillaivál; we all deify him as veritable god. What more honour would be placed at the feet of Agasthiyá! Much like Paranjyothi Munivar we are

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also duty-bound to honour and respect our Tamil teachers. I am planning to return to my mentor Pillaivál, who embodies Shivabakthi and Tamil leadership like Agasthiyá himself. I would beg all of you to give me leave." So I concluded.

The Grief of Parting:

The listeners who were engrossed in the joy of listening to the melodic beauty of the stanzas, suddenly felt a gloom engulfing them. Many persons had known that I would be leaving Kárai. Even so on listening to this piece of information from me they felt an overpowering grief. Some shed tears. Even today I can be profoundly moved on recalling this outpouring of affection.

The discourse was completed with the benedictory verses. Many kinds of gifts followed – mostly dresses and cash. I received around 200 rupees. After settling minor debts I was left with 150 rupees. With this amount we were able to settle the balance of the debt incurred in connection with my wedding.

I took leave of everyone. Local dignitaries came to me one by one and made a request: "Ayyá, please don't forget us. After you have satisfied your needs, make it a point to come back here and fulfil our needs too." So much of affection in their words! What tenderness! What warmth! God has secured the great quality of love and affection in the depths of people's hearts. Without this gift of love, the world would be no better than veritable hell.

Events at Chenganam:

Krishnasámi Reddiár did not come forward to grant me leave; we arranged to force an 'adieu' out of him. While we were leaving he told me, "If you could edit Bhágavatham and bring out an edited text I would be happy to be of help."

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I promised to look into this matter and left for Chenganam with my parents.

In Chenganam Viruddáchala Reddiár and his son Nallappa Reddiár were happy to hear about what all had happened in Kárai. Nallappa Reddiár realized how eager I was to return to Pillaivál. He said, "It is better you go there by yourself. Your father and mother can stay on here." I agreed to his proposition. My fother was in no mood for another spell of separation from me. Further, we had heard the news that Cholera was raging in the Kumbakonam area those days. This information armed my parents in their plea against my going ot Kumbakonam. "Please don't go there now. Its better you stay here a little longer and proceed to Kumbakonam after the epidemic had subsided," they pleaded with me. I was well and truly determined not to delay my rejoining my guru even for a day.

I politely rejected their entreaties and left, saying, "I have been studying and conducting discourses on Thiruvilaiyádal all these days. I am confidant that the grace of Sri Meenákshi Sundaresar will sure protect me". While I referred to the benediction of Lord Sri Meenákshi Sundaresar, I treasured in my heart the protective grace and love of my Teacher bearing the name of the Lord himself.

Reaching Thiruvávaduthurai:

While leaving Chenganam my mother walked a full mile with me and reluctantly gave me a tear-filled farewell saying, "Only god should bestow on you His protective grace." I went straight to Thiruvávaduthurai. My Teacher had returned to Thiruvávaduthurai after the Arangetram of his Puránam at Ambar. As soon as I saw him he exclaimed, "I hope you don't have plans to go back again. Would you be able to stay on here?"

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"I have no important work other than to learn lessons under your feet." I told him. He fondly enquired after the welfare of my mother and father.

Subramania Desikar's Advice:

Then my Teacher told me, "You better go and see Sannidánam. You have not seen the Sannidánam for many months." I went to the Mutt and called on Sri Subramania Desikar.

"You were not to be seen for many months. Pillaivál would often be talking about you. Are you doing well?" Desikar graciously enquired.

I replied him appropriately. Then Desikar told me affectionately: "It is important that a person like you should always be near Pillaivál. He is not enjoying good health these days. We should not burden him with too much strain in taking lessons. Persons like you could directly learn lessons from him. Seasoned students like you can teach the newcomers. This would provide some relief to Pillaivál. It gives us considerable happiness to see increasing number of students in the Mutt."

Kamba Rámáyanam Lessons:

I politely took leave of Desikar and rejoined Pillaivál. I mentioned to him my desire to learn Kamba Rámáyanam lessons. Kumárasámi Thambirán, Saverinátha Pillai and a few others also joined me in this request. In response to our wishes Teacher began teaching the great epic from the very beginning.

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62. DOUBLE DEEPÁVALI

The fury of Cholera was visible everywhere. Many persons had fallen prey to the epidemic in the villages surrounding Thiruvávaduthurai. A few people had died in Thiruvávaduthurai also. Those who knew nothing about the disease kept lamenting, "Bad days have arrived. The grip of evil 'Kali' epoch is tightening. Dharma is getting decimated. This epidemic is the inevitable fallout. "Some others volunteered their own opinions. "The railway trains have come. Moral ritual conduct is on decline. And we are reaping the results."

Vedanayagam Pillai's Entreaty:

The government officials were distributing medicines in all the villages to prevent the spread of this epidemic. The Munsiff of Máyuram, Vedanáyagam Pillai, also extended his help within his means. Further, he composed and sent some verses to Subramania Desikar, requesting him to buy necessary medicines and distribute them in the surrounding villages. Here is one such stanza:

(Kattalai Kalitthurai)

"Ilakkana miekkarai máthirai yámiv valavumindri
Malakkan vilaipini yárpalar
Máindhanar manduminnoi
Vilakka varulpuri mummala noikeda vithaganá
Nilakka Nurai Subb Biramani Yánandha ninmalane."

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(Subramania
The Learned and the Pure
Who blesses the world
Driving away the disease
Of three Malams impending salvation!
Grammar prescribes
Half a moment for mei (consonant),
In even less time
Their mei(body) destroyed
By this disease deadly.
Lavish your grace
To flush out this pestilence).

On receiving this petition Desikar arranged to procure large quantities of medical supplies and had them distributed to all the villages with the assistance of the village munsiff.

Being aware that parents would be very anxious about my welfare I sent letters to them frequently informing them about my well-being.

My Younger Uncle:

Sundaram Iyer was my younger aunt Meenákshi Ammál's husband. He was working as Karnam or village accountant in Idamanal village in Seekázhi Taluk. A person of gentle disposition and busy ways; well-versed in music; an ardent devotee of Shivá. The person who was then the Karnam in Thiruvávaduthurai was interested in getting transferred to another village. My younger uncle had a desire to move to Thiruvávaduthurai. They discussed among themselves and arranged to get their mutual transfer approved. This enabled my younger uncle to move to Thiruvávaduthurai with his family. I had made my own little contribution in this matter.

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When he moved to Thiruvávaduthurai I told myself, "Hereafter I can have tasty food in a timely manner and be under their care." I started having my food in their house.

Necessary provisions would reach his house from the Mutt. My younger aunt was very appreciative of this. Her affection for me was similar to my mother's, but with a minor difference. My mother would occasionally chide me. But I had never found any trace of disapproval in my younger aunt. She was one of those noble souls to be remembered when one's heart is full. Forbearance was her ornament.

My younger uncle was also very fond of me. He was a workaholic, always engrossed in his work. Would not be distracted by any outside pulls. While he was the village accountant in the village full of Mutt's lands, he would never manoeuvre to get close to the Head of the Mutt and curry his favour. This won him respect from the officials of the Mutt.

The Study of Kamba Rámáyanam:

Our Teacher was taking Kamba Rámáyanam lessons for us. The unparalleled beauty of Rámáyaná and his intense love of Tamil were the prime movers for this lesson. But for these he was in no condition to conduct lessons for the students. His body had become so frail. He was afflicted by 'Pittha Pándu'(Anaemia with bilious complications). It made his feet and stomach swollen. He was weak and exhausted.

He lacked the energy and zest to take lessons. One hundred to one hundred and fifty stanzas were covered everyday. He wouldn't explain the meaning for every verse. We would keep reading each verse. He would intervene oc-

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casionally and explain the significance of stanzas of particular excellence. Teaching had become somewhat nominal; but he used to listen intently and savoured the epic. The Rámáyaná stanzas had a therapeutic effect on his frail body.

He would occasionally pay moving tributes to Kambar's poetic finesse. Would request us to repeat many times a few particularly beautiful verses. He used to find more delight in getting immersed in the beauty of such verses than in expatiating on the poetic nuances embedded in those verses. He did not explain in words the meaning of some verses; his tears of joy were an eloquent commentary. "When come such another? What beauty? How exquisite! Are these verses composed and sculpted after great deliberation? How beautiful is this spontaneous expression of poetic trance!" He would lose himself in lapping up the poetic finesse. We lost ourselves in Kambar's poetry. So did he. But, he was a poet and his aesthetic appreciation was at a different level. A poet has a natural ease in entering another poet's heart!

Whenever my Teacher was lost in admiration of Kambar I would think more of my Teacher than of Kambar. I used to regret the loss I had incurred by not listening to this epic earlier. 'Now he is in the grip of this fell disease. Where would it lead him?' A vague fear would assail me.

The Books composed by Teacher:

Though my Teacher was bodily afflicted by illness his poetic prowess had not waned. He started composing a Thiribu Andháthi on the holy site of Thiruvidaimarudur. As requested by the Head of the Mutt he started writing the History of Sri Sivagnána Yogigal. Of the two works only the *Thiribu Andháthi* got completed. Pillaivál had considerable regard for Sri Sivagnána Yogigal. So he wanted to

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construct the work as an epic. Conforming to the structure of an epic he started composing the section extolling the special features of the land and the site. He was also keen to highlight the glory of Thiruvávaduthurai and the eminence of the line of succession of the Mutt Head. The epic which started with such an elaborate foundation had to remain incomplete.

Having come to know of our Teacher's illness, Subramania Desikar sent him to Thiruvidamarudur with all the attendant comforts and made him stay at the Kattalai Madam there. The royal physician of Thiruvidamarudur, Seshachala Náidu, was administering medicines to Pillaivál. Special Services were held in the temple praying for his cure and welfare.

A few disciples, including myself, stayed in Thiruvávaduthurai. We would go to Thiruvidamarudur on alternate days, see our Master and report back to Subramania Desikar.

Music as Medicine:

During those days Master was suffering from Insomnia. So, at his request I would sing Tamil keerthanás during the nights. Though not trained in music, the frail Master got engrossed in those keerthanás and tended to forget the pangs of the illness. The music and the limpid style of the keerthanás seeped into him. *Nandanár Charitram* keerthanás provided him particular sense of relief.

The medical potions and incantations did not have much of an impact. As suggested by Subramania Desikar he got back to Thiruvávaduthurai. Appropriate medical treatment continued there. The visitors to the Mutt invariably called on Pillaivál and grieved over his ill health.

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During the month of Aippasi Master went to Mayuram for Deepávali, at his son's request. Some students also accompanied him. Subramania Desikar gave away new dresses to be worn during Deepávali by Pillaivál and his disciples.

A Flawed Deepávali:

I stayed on in Thiruvávaduthurai. Had the ritual bath in my uncle's house. The Mutt Head had given new Deepávali dresses to those in the Mutt and others. For some reason I did not get it. During Thulá month Desikar sent me to Máyuram to bring Pillaivál. As soon as I saw him the first question he asked me was, "Did you not get the Veshti from the Mutt for Deepávali?" He had somehow got to know of this. While I was not unduly concerned about it, it continued as an irritant for my 'guru'. "While new dress is being given to all the students in the Mutt, what is the justification to have excluded you? Sannidánam is so fond of you. Should he not have looked into the matter?" He lamented.

"In the big crowd it could have slipped his mind. Or, he could've thought that I had already got my share. No need to attribute any reason for this." I tried to assuage his feelings.

"No need for such excuses. One does not frequently get opportunities to express true affection. If it is not done at the right time there is no point in proclaiming that there is love and affection. What may be trivial for the rich can cause hurt to those hungering for true love."

His words highlighted how deeply my Master had been hurt by this matter. The basic reason was his profound love and concern for me. I realized that any further excuse on my part could provoke him more and kept quiet.

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Another Deepávali:

Master didn't stop there. He called an attendant, handed over some money to him and sent him to the shop to buy me a new 'Pattháru Vasthram'(Two pieces – one of ten and the other six cubits in length). He himself applied turmeric to the tips of the two pieces and handed them over to me. "Come on, wear this, " he told me affectionately. I put them on at once. Deepávali visited me twice that year. The first was for the common Deepávali celebrated with everyone else at Thiruvávaduthurai. And now the second one at Máyuram, in the presence of my guru, bathed in his loving look and wearing the clothes so graciously handed over by him. I felt ecstatic.

He looked at me affectionately and sighed, "How lovely does it look now!" It appeared as if he was rid of a hurt he had been harbouring for a few days.

I quietly told him the purpose of my visit. "Let's stay on here for a few more days. You too," He interjected. Accordingly I stayed on in Máyuram for a few days.

Rámáyanam Copies:

One day I found a person selling all the seven cantoes of Rámáyanam in the Máyuram bazár. As I was then learning Rámáyanam lessons and I was making do with borrowed books I was very eager to buy those Rámáyanam volumes. But, I didn't have the money for it. On enquiry the shopkeeper told me firmly," "Seven rupees. Not one pie less." My urge to buy those books grew all the more. But there was no way in sight.

I rushed straight to my junior uncle in Thiruvávaduthurai, informed him of the matter and asked for money. He had just then got his salary, all of seven rupees. With no

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trace of hesitation he handed over the money to me. I rushed back to the shopkeeper in Máyuram and collected all the six volumes of Kamba Rámáyanam. The fatigue of rushing to Thiruvávaduthurai and back was submerged in the joy of getting those books.

I carried the books with joy gleaming in my face and placed them at Master's feet.

"What books are these?"

"Kamba Rámáyanam. I bought them for the privilege of receiving them with your blessings."

"Price?"

"Seven rupees".

"How did you get the money?"

I told him how I had gone to Thiruvávaduthurai and got the money from my uncle. He immediately said, "Oh no why did you have to take all the trouble? I have those books. You could've taken them. Why didn't you tell me a word about it? Anyway, you've bought it. Good. Study well and win acclaim." With these words of blessings he handed over the books to me.

I received the books and touched my eyes with them reverentially. Had Master been in good health as before I would've listened to his exposition of two cantos. I found his frailty wrenching. A nameless dread was simmering within me.

A few days later Teacher reached Thiruvávaduthurai in a palanquin. The disciples with him, including myself, followed him.

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63. GATES OF HEAVEN OPENED

My Teacher arrived At Thiruvávaduthurai in 'Yuva' year at the beginning of 'Kárthigai' month (November 1875). We were learning the Ayodya Canto of Kamba Rāmāyanam. Because of his frail health we could cover only about thirty stanzas per day. He was receiving proper medical attention. Subramania Desikar closely monitored that he was provided all the comforts. But all this did not make a dent on his illness. The time was apparently not propitious. Kumárasámi Thambirán performed the poojás on behalf of Pillaivál and brought him the prasádham.

Though Master's health was in decline, there was no change in the glory of his character. His brilliance, affection, respect and magnanimity glowed prominently against the background of his frailty.

Severity of Illness:

The cruel disease was gradually sapping Master's energy; frailty was becoming more pronounced. He stopped taking lessons. He tended to be bedridden most of the time.

Saverinátha Pillai was constantly by his side tending to his needs. I too assisted in the effort.

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The Help rendered by my Aunt:

My aunt was an expert cook. As one who had savoured the taste of her preparations, I requested her to prepare Master's favourite items and bring them to him. As I had moved with him I knew what were his favourite items. Heeding to my request my aunt would prepare them with evident affection and involvement. Master would truly enjoy these items. His joy would fill my heart.

It became evident to everyone that Master was getting ready for the final journey. His son and wife came to Thiruvávaduthurai from Máyuram.

My Parents Arrived:

Those days my parents used to live in Veppur village on the northern bank of Kollidam. My father enjoyed the benevolence of one Muthusámi Nainár from Kallai village, a brother-in-law of Udayárpálayam zamindár. I had sent a letter to my father informing him of Pillaivál's ill health. He immediately came to Thiruvávaduthurai with my mother and stayed in my aunt's house. Thanks to Subramania Desikar's affection towards me, the Mutt officials supplied provisions at a mere suggestion from me. Therefore, my parents could get whatever they wanted without any difficulty.

Golden words:

Though Master had stopped taking lessons, he would clarify wherever we raised our doubts. He would ask for his favourite texts to be read aloud, and listen to them with a lot of interest. I did most of the reading.

Master would be lying down in bed, Saverinátha Pillai sat by his side and stroked his legs and hands. I sat closeby and read from Theváram and Thiruvásakam. The place was

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full of disciples and visitors. Our eyes were steeped in apprehension.

While reading Theváram verses I would be assailed by a doubt. I would raise it with Master. He would explain in a few words in a halting pace. As he had delved into and researched on Theváram and Thiruvásagam over a long period, his replies were a veritable treasure. The eminence of the subject matter was not the only cause; even when his physical faculties were in decline Master's passion for Tamil remained sharp. As I realized that those were the words of a great man in terminal decline, I was drinking in every word with passion. At the same time, I was tormented by the threat of a dark future. I could not help being rocked by the thought that listening to such golden words would soon fade into a memory.

'A Calf Pushed Aside':

Márkazhi came and disappeared. Thai came too. But, no way out was in sight. Master's health plunged lower and lower causing the worst of fears. He could only explain a few matters from Theváram.

One day I was reading Thiruvásagam. It explained the glory of Lord Shivá's benediction, steeped in aesthetic finesse and soaked in the spirit of bhakthi; Master shed tears on listening to such verses. It was evident that those divine stanzas had simply melted his heart. While his heart was always anchored in Lord Shivá's sacred feet, that vibration sometimes dominated over other thoughts. At that point his mind was totally absorbed in that bhakthi, to the exclusion of any other thought.

I read a portion of Thiruvásagam named Thirukothumbi:

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'Noyutru Moothuná nundhugandrá yingirundhu
Náyutra Selva Nayanthariyá Vannamellán
Tháyutru vandhennai yándu konda dhankarunaith
Theyutra Selvarkkay sendroodhái Kothumbi'

(Here am I
Aged and sick
Like a calf nosed aside;
Much like a dog
Oblivious of its riches,
Not realizing the grace
And its motherly embrace.
O! King bee!
Go forth and hum to that
Kindly light.)

As I read the verse I could not figure out the meaning of the term '*Nundhu Kandrai*'. I looked up to Master to raise a doubt. Tears were pouring down his cheeks. "What is the significance of the term 'Nundhu Kandrai"? I asked him. He could not speak clearly; he was stammering. His voice choked. Amidst this stammer he said, "Like a calf nosed aside." Looking at him in that emotionally charged condition I too broke into tears. Frail beyond words, Master bathed in the verse's profound sentiment. The lines, 'Here am I, aged and sick, like a calf nosed aside' wrenched his heart. Mánikkavásagar's words reflected Master's predicament. Sick and old as he was, the lines,

'Much like a dog
Oblivious of its riches
Not realizing the grace
And its motherly embrace.
O! King Bee!
Go forth and hum to that
Kindly light'

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struck a chord in him and melted his heart. In these lines Mánikkavásagar talks gratefully of Lord Shivá's benign grace showered on him. Maybe Master was longing to be likewise bathed in divine grace. Though he was in this very world, all these thoughts engulfed him and transported him elsewhere. "Now, he is not speaking to us. He is in conversation with the Almighty. Like Mánikkavásagar said, he is bidding his 'King Bee Mind' to hum at the floral feet of Lord Shivá." At that point I had not quite realized this profound meaning. Silence reigned for a while. He was lost in Thiruvásagam. I dissolved in resonant sentiment. And then I continued reading.

Desikar's Enquiry:

The Gurupoojá of the founder of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam, Sri Namasiváyamoorthy, commenced in the month of Thai. The festivities were launched in the temple. The festive spirit dominated the Mutt and the temple. As usual, visitors thronged from outside places. Thambiráns, savants and dignitaries had assembled. Most of the visitors were grief-struck on knowing about Pillaivál's health condition. They all exchanged prayerful words about his great qualities of head and heart. 'When he is gone, when comes such another?' – this thought dominated them.

Though Subramania Desikar was involved in the Gurupoojá activities, he was not at peace with himself. He kept enquiring about Pillaivál's condition. 'How is he now? Is he able to eat something? How is his memory? Does he speak? Is he able to understand when we speak to him?" He was all questions and all eagerness. On the 20th day of Thai (January 31st, 1876) Master's health took a plunge. Saverinátha Pillai and I were at a loss; we gave him milk little by little. In the night Lord Gomatheeswarar was taken out in proces-

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sion. When I went out to have a darshan of the Lord near the temple gateway, Subramania Desikar enquired about Pillaivál's condition. I could barely find my voice. I was choking in grief. I managed to stammer out, "He is not able to speak now. Able to figure out what we say. Giving him milk little by little". Sannidhánam was in a bit of a daze. "That Pillaivál continues to be with us even in this condition is an honour to the Ádheenam. Who knows what is the grace of Lord Gomatheeswarar. Well, please go and take care of him." He gave me leave and I returned to Pillaivál.

Eternal Peace:

Master often lapsed into loss of memory. After midnight he remained unconscious for a long time. At one point he opened his eyes and tried to say something. It appeared as if he was referring to Thiruvásagam. I picked up the *Thiruvásagam* and started reading '*Adaikkalap-Patthu*', the ten verses outlining surrender to the Lord. Master was eminently suited to merge at the holy feet of Lord Shivá. He was keeping his eyes closed. Thiruvásagam verses must have seeped into his heart through his ears and left him in a state of bliss. That bliss left a trail of radiance in his face.

One person smeared a lot of holy ash on his forehead. Saverinátha Pillai supported his sinking body on his chest. I was reading the 'Adaikkalap-Patthu', verses. Suddenly there was a tremor from head to toe. The right eye opened. That was it. Possibly at that very moment the Gates of Shivá's Abode opened to let in a noble soul. Only when his breathing stopped did the passion for Tamil cease. The Thiruvásagam text slipped from my hands. A torrent of tears poured from my eyes.

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A Trail Of Grief:

Some of the assembled persons started wailing. Some others attempted to stifle their grief by cupping their mouths. I was at a loss. I kept looking at Master's sacred body. His face bathed in peace; his holy mouth which had taught me many a lesson; his eyes which had embraced me with his benign grace - I looked at all these and kept sobbing. 'Why not this be a mere lie. Why can't Pillaivál open his mouth again and speak?' When I looked at his body with these thoughts there was an illusion that his eyelids were moving again; that there was an appearance of movement in his mouth; that there was a semblance of breathing. The very next minute all these dissolved as mere fancied illusion.

Master's wife and son were there. Also many friends and admirers. The news spread instantly. Subramania Desikar was steeped in sorrow on hearing about Pillaivál's demise. He could not concentrate on any work.

The Next Day:

It dawned. But, no hope of dawn from the darkness that engulfed us. Many persons came, looked at Master's holy frame and sobbed. Many persons who had come to partake in the festivities of Gurupoojá were plunged in grief on hearing the passing of the principal Tamil scholar of the Mutt.

Subramania Desikar supervised the proper arrangements for the last rites. Priests had assembled from different places.

When I recall the scenes and words that marked Master's final journey I get a sinking feeling. Everyone had wailed their hearts out. The place was thronging with people - extolling Master's erudition; dissolving in admiration

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of his poetic genius; recalling the love and concern he lavished on his disciples; and lamenting the departure of a Titan with great qualities of head and heart.

The priests were walking in the funeral procession chanting Thiruvásagam. Hearing this my father exclaimed, "Who is going to appear again to explain Thiruvásagam like Pillaivál?" As I had known how Pillaivál was steeped in and became one with Thiruvásagam during his last days, my father's words shook me to the core.

Master had dedicated his life in delighting and enriching many minds, eyes and ears. His holy frame was accepted by fire-god. Chidambaram Pillai performed the obsequies. It was all over by twelve. Everyone returned after the ritual dip. I returned too, grieving my Master in an eternal nowhere.

The whole town sank in gloom.

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64. WORDS OF SOLACE

After my Master's passing, I was in a daze and my world, a blur. I sat in a corner of the house. Was in no mood to do anything. I picked up my Master's early work Thyágarása Leelai and kept reading it. But my mind would not concentrate. I was haunted by memories of Pillaivál. His imagery in the text was commendable. The more I read it the more intense was the agony of loss. I kept reading the text with tears welling up in my eyes. Was in no mood to eat.

A New Worry:

I left for the Mutt after one o' clock. Kumárasámi Thambirán was there in conversation with a few others. It concerned Pillaivál. On seeing me Kumárasámi Thambirán said, "More than anyone else you must be feeling the impact of the sorrow." I remained silent. He added sorrowfully: "When Pillaivál was in the Mutt many persons came from outside and heard lessons from him. The Mutt was full of so many students. It can't continue now. All the disciples should go back to their respective villages. They would come here only on special occasions."

On hearing these words, a new concern seized me. 'I had spent my time in happiness and comfort, listening to

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Pillaivál's lessons and writing down his dictations. What do I do hereafter? What kind of relationship can I have with the Mutt in future? What lies ahead for me?' This concern led to a fear that, without the great support of Pillaivál, I may be forced to drift with no pillar of support.

I thought that I would do well to see Subramania Desikar rather than standing there, utterly baffled. I went inside the Mutt.

Desikar was sitting in his state-room. On seeing him, the grief I had bottled up inside me burst out and I wept loudly. However hard I tried I could not control my sobs. Desikar told me graciously, "What is the point in this grief? Such an irreversible loss has occurred. We are also in deep anguish. But we do not display it. . But you are not able to control your overpowering grief. Where can one find the unique love and concern he had for you?"

Desikar's Words of Comfort:

His words only deepened my grief. I sobbed again.

"There is no merit in grieving over what is beyond our control. Except for the grievous loss of Pillaivál, you will find nothing wanting in this place. Hereafter, you can learn your lessons from us. You can teach new students and be by my side always. We will ensure that you suffer from no want. Please think of this place as your own. You can also be an inmate of this Mutt, just like the Thambiráns here. You would lack nothing."

I knew that these words of solace were not spoken merely for the sake of courtesy.

I took leave of him and returned. While I had felt that Subramania Desikar had considerable affection for me, the words of Kumárasámi Thambirán stirred me a great deal.

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Steeped as I had been in Pillaivál's affection, I didn't have an opportunity to realize the depth of others' affection. After Pillaivál's passing, Desikar's concern and affection became evident to me.

Letters:

All the visitors for the Mutt enquired after Pillaivál's passing while meeting Desikar. On hearing Desikar on such occasions, his regard for Pillaivál was obvious. Many also came to talk to me.

As described by Subramania Desikar, the news of Pillaivál's demise was relayed through letters to friends and well-wishers. Kumárasámi Thambirán also wrote to a few of them. Chidambaram Pillai and I too wrote to many.

Many friends conveyed their grief in letters. Many savants such as Máyuram Vedanáyagam Pillai composed eulogies. Sri Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and his elder brother Rámasámi Iyer wrote letters and verses in honour of Pillaivál.

While many had composed moving elegies, I did not feel like composing similar stanzas. Do mere words have the power to express adequately the profound grief? I was not inclined to demonstrate my grief merely as a fodder to a stanza.

Subramania Desikar settled all the debt left by Pillaivál and also extended suitable help to his family. Chidambaram Pillai moved to Máyuram with his mother and stayed there.

When they moved to Máyuram I accompanied them, stayed there for two days and then returned to Thiruvávaduthurai. I met Vedanáyagam Pillai at Máyuram. He expressed his grief over Pillaivál's demise and paid homage to his immense erudition.

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Thyágarása Chettiár's Arrival:

The day before Pillaivál's death Thyágarása Chettiár lost his mother. So, he had not come to Thiruvávaduthurai; he had only sent a letter of condolence. He came to Thiruvávaduthurai on the completion of the obsequies for his mother. He called on Desikar and shared his grief over Pillaivál's demise. As one who knew of the depth of regard I had for my Master, he consoled me in a number of ways.

A new situation emerged in my life. From an inseparable disciple of Pillaivál, I became Subramania Desikar's student and also a teacher taking lessons for a few other students.

My Father and Desikar:

My parents were living in my younger aunt's house, along with me. Subramania Desikar had not known about it. On one occasion, one Thyágarája Shástri from Pudukottai had met my father and enjoyed discussing music-related matters with him. He had known my father even earlier. On hearing Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás from my father, Shástri greatly admired the structure of these keerthanás.

Later, while conversing with Desikar at the Mutt, Thyágarása Shástri extolled my father's Shivabakthi, the greatness of his Shivapoojá and his knowledge of music. As Desikar was not aware of all this earlier, he exclaimed, "Really! I had not known about this till now. Nor has Sáminátha Iyer told me." He turned towards me.

"Your musical talent must have been inherited from your father, "Desikar said.

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"Yes".

"How come you have not brought your father here all these days? Hasn't he come to this town earlier?"

"He has come here on a few occasions. I thought I shouldn't be unnecessarily encroaching upon Sannidhánam's valuable time."

"What do you mean? Don't you know only too well how happy we are to meet and converse with such persons?"

My father came to the Mutt that afternoon and had a long talk with Desikar. Thereafter he met Desikar often and was engaged in lively conversations with him. Thanks to this, my father came to realize Desikar's magnanimity, intellectual prowess, benevolence and the regard he had for scholars. If any musician happened to come to the Mutt and sing, Desikar would invite my father to listen to these musical concerts.

It was the practice of Desikar to go to Cauvery early morning, have his bath, proceed to the temple for Swámi darshan and return to the Mutt. As my father was also used to waking up early in the morning and have his bath, he also went to Kaveri, completed his bath and ritual observances. As their schedule broadly synchronized, my father accompanied Desikar till they reached the temple and then returned home.

Desikar usually went to the temple for the second evening darshan. My father went to the temple at that time, accompanied Desikar to the temple for darshan, took Desikar back to the Mutt and returned home. All these strengthened the relationship between Desikar and my father.

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As he could get adequate flowers and holy leaves for Shivapoojá and as he had access to other comforts too, my father enjoyed his stay at Thiruvávaduthurai.

Knowing about the rare qualities of Desikar, he would exclaim with joy, "Never in my life have I seen such a place and persons of such qualities."

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65. LESSONS TAUGHT BY DESIKAR

Másí month. The sacred Mahá Shivaráthri Day arrived. My father would spend the entire night performing poojá with Abhisheká. I went to Desikar to get from the Mutt the coconuts required for my father's poojá. During festive days the Mutt would supply coconut, tender-coconuts, bananas, vasthrá and sandalwood for use by the village folks for the poojás in their respective houses. As there were no shopping facilities they could not get these items anywhere else.

Shivaráthri Events:

When I went to Desikar, Thyágarája Shásri was with him. I sat there silently. I was hesitant to ask for the poojá paraphernalia. But Desikar could discern from my facial aspect that I had come to get some things, and asked me, "What's the matter? Do you require something?" I told him that coconuts and tender coconuts were required for my father's poojá.

Exclaiming "Oh! Is that so?" Desikar called the Odukka Thambirán and ordered him to bring the coconut and the Vináyaká idol brought by two persons the previous day. He immediately brought them. Desikar told me that we could use that coconut and Vináyaká idol.

On looking at them I was puzzled. 'We require a number of coconuts. He has given only one piece. We didn't ask for Vináyaká idol. Father already has a Vináyaká idol

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for his poojá. There would be no space for such a large Vináyaká idol'.

"What are you thinking? Shake the coconut. You would know if there is water inside or it is a ripe coconut. " Desikar told me.

I shook the coconut. There was water inside. "It is not dry. There is water inside."

"Have they stripped off the fibre well?" Desikar asked me with a smile.

"It is stripped off very well," I replied. At that point Desikar told Thyágarája Shástri, "Yesterday we bought this Pillaiyár for twenty rupees and this coconut for ten rupees."

Shástri: So expensive? Maybe, it is ok for the Pillaiyár idol. But, so much for a mere coconut? Is there an acute scarcity for coconuts?

Desikar: We felt like giving this price. The person who gave me this is a loyal disciple.

Shastri: In that case why do you call it the price for the coconut? We may take it to be your gift to the loyal disciple.

Desikar: No, no. We gave it only as a price for this coconut.

Shástri: What is so special in this coconut? A heavenly piece? Does it contain rubies inside? After all it should contain kernel and sweet water.

Desikar: If you break it you will find out.

Shástri immediately attempted to break the coconut. With a gentle smile Desikar stopped him and stated: "A farmer in a village belonging to the Mutt was raising sugarcane crop in the land. He made a coconut out of jiggery and

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offered it to us. Another farmer made a Vináyaká idol out of jiggery and submitted it to us. We appreciated the dexterity involved in shaping these two pieces and gave ten rupees to the person who brought the 'coconut' and twenty rupees for the Vináyaká idol.".

Only then did we find out the truth. We were filled with surprise. Desikar sent me away after telling me, "Please hand these over to your father. The coconuts and other items will follow."

I took them to my father and started explaining the background. At that very point, two large baskets full of tender coconuts, ripe coconuts and other things were brought in.

My father was utterly delighted. He performed the Shivaráthri Poojá to his heart's satisfaction.

Desikar's Orders:

Among the students at Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt one Melagaram Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar and I moved as brothers. We mostly studied together and stayed together. One day Desikar called both of us and told us, "After your meal during the day and night, you come to us to study new texts. On other occasions we studied together the texts we had not taken up till now. We ascertained from the other new students what texts they wanted to study and taught them according to their ability. Taking lessons for them would also help you in developing your knowledge." He also gave direction to Kumárasámi Thambirán and other colleagues to do likewise. So we did.

Kamba Rámáyanam:

Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar, myself and others stayed in the house earlier occupied by Pillaivál and studied and

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taught there. We studied and researched many Kávyás such as Bháratham, *Bhágavatham* and *Thirukutrála Puránam* as also several kinds of *Prabandams*. We had already learnt under *Pillaivál Kamba Rámáyanam* upto a part of Ayodhyá canto. We were eager to study the entire Rámáyaná text. So, we accessed Pillaivál's palm-leaf manuscript and other palm-leaf manuscripts available in the Mutt, and went through them twice. We noted down in a handbook as also in loose sheets the textual variations we had come across.

Studying Ṇannool:

Under Subramania Desikar we learnt Grammar texts, Saiva Siddhantha Shástrá texts and some literary works. When we wanted to learn the commentaries on Nannool, Desikar shared with us a few interesting pieces of information: "Shankara Namachiváyar wrote the first commentary on Nannool. Later Sivaprakása Munivar critically elaborated the commentary. With a view to lucidly highlighting the rare Sanskrit and Tamil usages incorporated in his *Sivagnána Bodha Drávida Mahá Bháshya*, he had written texts such as *Ilakkana Kothu*, *Tholkáppiya Sootthira Virutthi* and *Ilakkana Vilakka Soorávali*. He appropriately included some of them in his commentary on Nannool. At some places, he abbreviated the original and elsewhere he changed or supplemented. You can clearly grasp the *Virutthi Urai* (Elaborate Commentary) only after learning the *Ilakkana Kotthu* and the other two texts I had presently mentioned." Then he showed us a palmleaf manuscript with corrections incorporated by Sivagnána Munivar in his own hand. We were amazed and delighted on seeing the copy.

As directed by Desikar we studied the three texts including Ilakkana Kotthu and then started learning Nannool Virutthi Urai. The Mutt had a palm-leaf manuscript con-

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taining Shankara Namachiváyar Commentary. We compared *Sivagnána Munivar Virutthi Urai* with *Shankara Namachiváyar Urai* and noted the places where Sivagnána Munivar had made amendments. We made a small notation '*Si*' in places where such amendments had been made.

Other Grammar Texts:

When we took up *Yápperunkalak-Kárigai*, Desikar elaborately explained the matters dealt with in the preface to the original text. Nobody had so far explained these matters with such lucidity. We also studied *Dandi Alankáram*, a Tamil rendition of the Sanskrit text "*Kávya Darsham*'. While handling the lesson, Desikar would refer to the slokás in the original Sanskrit text and explain them clearly. We studied the '*Ani Ilakkanam*' (Ani Grammar) written by Visáka Perumál Iyer. It had been adapted from the Sanskrit text '*Kuvalaiyánandá*'. Desikar used to heap praise on the structure of that text and the poems used as illustrations.

When we were studying the Grammar of Aesthetics, I would incorporate the elements of rhetoric and figure of speech in my own stanzas on Desikar and show them to him. While appreciating my effort, he would not fail to point out and correct the errors.

We studied on our own the Ilampooranár Commentary on *Tholkáppiyam Ezhutthu Adhikáram*, Senávaraiyar's Commentary on '*Sol Adhikáram*' and *Ilakkana Vilakkam* and clarified our doubts with Desikar. Desikar was very enthusiastic while clarifying doubts on Senávaraiyar Commentary. "None can equal him in writing commentary on a grammar text. Because of his knowledge of Sanskrit he has written lucidly and logically on many subtle aspects of the text."

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Akam and Puram:

We learnt only all parts of Grammar; Phonetics and Phonology, Morphology, Literary Convention, Prosody and Rhetoric. We had not studied the grammar of Akam Love Poetry. We learnt the grammar of Akam only as a part of studying '*Thirucchitrambala Kovai*' and its commentary; we did not specifically study the grammar of Akam. Those days very few people took up a study of Akam Grammar separately. There was no research on the Puram literary convention forming part of Puram Grammar. While no one studied Akam Grammar, they did study Akam-oriented literature. As far as Puram was concerned, no one was familiar with Puram literary texts. Nor did anyone seek related grammatical treatises.

When studying Yápperunkalak-Kárigai we could not clearly understand the meaning of the verses shown as illustrations for the prosodic type. They mainly contained references related to Jainism. Such doubts had persisted ever since I studied the text under Viruddháchala Reddiár. In this context, Desikar told us: "Sri Kumara Gurupara Swámigal has composed a Prabandam called Chidambara Seiyull Kovai, providing poetic illustrations of the prosodic details mentioned in the Kárigai. As this work relates to Saivism it would be readily clear to us. This text will be very useful to understand Prosody." Accordingly he taught us that text.

Parimelazhagar:

I then studied Thirukkural with the help of Parimelazhagar's commentary. It was Desikar's opinion that as Senávaraiyar was unequalled in composing commentaries on Grammar texts, Parimelazhagar was unparalleled in respect of commentaries on literary texts. "We would look at a Kural and think that it has no special significance. But

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Parimelazhagar has the insight to highlight something special in it. None could equal him in bringing out the essence of a verse briefly and sharply." Desikar would often heap praise on Parimelazahgar. I understood many subtle aspects of Kural during the Kural lessons.

Siddhánthá Texts:

When I expressed a desire to study *Saiva Siddhántha Shástrá*, Desikar asked me to study *Shivaprakása Kaṭtalai* and *Thiruválaváí Kattalai*. He wanted me to study subsequently commentary on *Shiva Gnána Bodhá* and the commentary on *Shiva Gnána Siddhiyár*.

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66. VISITORS OF THE MUTT

We were then playing a dual role. While we were students, at Desikar's command, we also donned the mantle of teachers teaching Tamil texts to Kutti Thambiráns in the Mutt and a few others.

My Students:

Several Thambiráns were my students during that period: Sundaralinga Thambirán, Vishwalinga Thambirán, Chokkalinga Thambirán, Ponnambala Thambirán, Mahálinga Thambirán, Vánampádi Subramania Thambirán, and Sivakozhundhu Thambirán.

The so-called 'White-dhothies'(i.e., lay persons) were also in the group. Keraḷam Ramakrishna Pillai, Ezháyiram Pannai Dhámodaram Pillai, Neivannam Sámi Pillai, Thiruvávaduthurai Ponnusámi Chettiár, Thiruvávaduthurai Shanmugam Pillai, and one Kovilur Paradesi were prominent among them. I divided them into pairs and took lessons to each group for half-an-hour to one hour. The only survivor among these students is Siranjeevi Shanmugam Pillai living in South Street after retiring from a senior position in Thiruvávaduthurai. Apart from these persons there were a few occasional students on visits to the Mutt. Some of my students were older than I was. Even so, they treated me with respect and affection. They were very supportive

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and protective of us.

Annámalai Reddiár:

Chinnikkulam Annámalai Reddiár who had composed Kávadi Chindhu came to Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt to learn Tamil. Chetrur Meenákshi Sundara Kaviráyar had brought him. Subramania Desikar entrusted him to my care. I taught him Nannool and Máyura Puránam. Even in those days, he had the ability to compose verses effortlessly. He could compose verses in a jiffy incorporating elements of Yamagam, Madakku, Thirubu and Sannam. But, he was not particularly enthusiastic about learning Grammar. He spent a few days there and returned to his village.

Father's Wish:

My father who was with me those days wished to return to Udaiyárpálayam. He was not inclined to be idling in Thiruvávaduthurai, with no work. He wished to take me also along with him. He continued to be in favour of leading a life of comfort by delivering discourses. "If you continue to stay here like this, where would we live? You are already married. Should you not be setting up a family of your own? This is, of course, a fine place. But, can food be the sole requirement of a person? How long more can we be moving from place to place, separated from you? I am planning to seek the Mutt's Head's consent to take you along with me." Appá made his position clear. I did not respond either positively or negatively. I had no heart to leave Thiruvávaduthurai. Separation from parents was also saddening. I was in a dilemma.

Desikar's Support:

One day my father met Subramania Desikar and informed him that he was planning to leave for home and

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expressed his desire to take me along with him. Desikar promptly replied him: "Hereafter your son belongs here. There are many more Tamil texts to be studied by him. We would ourselves mentor him. He has been very useful in teaching the boys who came here to study. Only hereafter can we derive full benefit of what he learnt from Pillaivál. It is better you go to your place, collect all your things and move here on a permanent basis. We will ensure that all your needs are fully met here. We will arrange to get a house built for your use. Devoid of all worries, you can live here in comfort, enjoying bath in Kāveri and performing Shivapoojá."

My father's happiness increased by the minute while listening to Desikar. He nearly fogot himself. When Desikar stopped, two floral sparks dropped from a sacred lamp nearby. "Ayyá, this is a good omen. He would be happy and prosper here. Please go to your village and return soon." Desikar reiterated his request. He blessed my father with a present of clothes and gave him ten rupees for his expenses. Observing all this, my heart was brimming with happiness.

My father had constantly been in the grip of the indigent family situation. On seeing the way out of this seemingly intractable predicament, he was overjoyed. He paid homage to Desikar and went home straight. On the way he kept repeating, 'What nobility! What nobility!! There is no place equal to this'.

"This is a result of the merit I had earned in my former lives. I am not taking Sámá with me now. Lord Parameshwará's grace is ready to save us." He told my mother and others with great enthusiasm and repeated what Desikar had told him.

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On an auspicious day my father took leave of everyone, and left for Udayárpálayam with my mother and younger brother.

Having realized in full the depth of Subramania Desikar's affection towards me, I did not then grieve over my separation from my father. I was confident that he would soon return and that we will live together as one happy family. The events in the Mutt also reinforced this upbeat feeling. Not only was Subramania Desikar affectionate towards me; he made sure that those in the Mutt and the dignitaries visiting the Mutt became keenly aware that I was the recipient of his special affection.

Occasional Verse:

Whenever dignitaries visited the Mutt, Desikar would direct us to compose new verses. He would also ask us to recite verses we had already learnt and explain their meaning. He would ask me to read out important portions of *Tholkáppiya Páyira Virutthi*, *Ilakkana Vilakka Soorávali* and *Sivagnána Bháshai*; and he would himself explain these verses to them. His explanation was always lucid and interesting. For selected verses, he spelt out meaning word for word. The visitors would marvel at the agreeable manner in which he offered explanation. Those occasions opened up new vistas to me. I was mostly tasked with the work of reading out the text. Kumárasámi Thambirán also used to chip in sometimes.

The scholars visiting the Mutt would be armed with their compositions extolling Desikar's glory in the form of songs, keerthanás and slokás. They recited them and also expatiated on their significance. I used to read out again the Tamil songs and keerthanás. I would also recite these verses when other dignitaries visited the Mutt. Thanks to this prac-

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tice, most of these verses got etched in my memory. There were others who would read out Sanskrit slokás and Telugu pattiyam.

The Profit for Visitors:

When dignitaries called on Desikar, their conversation mainly centred on learning and scholarship. The conversation was also punctuated with reciting verses and dwelling on their meaning; this would generate interest in Tamil in some of the visitors not acquainted with Tamil learning. They would resolve to themselves, "To come to this place without knowledge of Tamil is unpardonable. Next time I should come here with some knowledge of some aspect of Tamil".

The scholars who came to the Mutt for the first time realized the kind of support they received; so, during the second visit, they would attempt to enhance their knowledge and display it suitably to receive even higher rewards. As for the dignitaries, their second visits were marked by a conscious training in Tamil texts to enrich their conversations with Desikar. Both these kinds of visitors derived benefits from their association with the Mutt.

Vedanáyakam Pillai:

Vedanáyakam Pillai, who was a Munsiff in Máyuram, used to visit Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt occasionally. He would invariably come with his compositions in Subramania Desikar's praise. I used to read them out. Those verses were in limpid style and very reader-friendly. That a Christian dignitary composed verses eulogizing the Head of a Saivite Mutt was indeed amazing. People were surprised all the more that the author of the eulogy, Vedanáyakam Pillai, was not used to flattering people and that he was a responsible government official.

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Vedanáyakam Pillai was a disciple of Pillaivál and had known about the glory of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt and about the erudition and fine qualities of its Head, only through Pillaivál. He could now see for himself that the Mutt was devoted to the fostering of Tamil. Consequently he developed a high regard for Subramania Desikar.

He had composed a verse praising Desikar for fostering Tamil during a time when English language was in a pre-eminent position. Here is the verse:

Vánen rud*hava varum Subramania Varodayanae*
Thánendru vennaran bházhaiyin náttir thalaiyedukka
Eenendru ketpavarilládha Thamizhai inidhalikka
Nánendru kanganan katti kondái yindha nánilathae.

(O, Subramania favoured by gods,
Benevolent like lofty clouds!
When language of Whites
Holds sway in this land,
Come have you
With resolve unbending
To foster sweet Tamil
Languishing sans support.)

Vedanáyakam Pillai had composed a number of verses in this tone. Some visitors to the Mutt would ask with surprise if Munsiff Vedanáyakam Pillai had composed verses about His Holiness. At this, Desikar would direct me to recite some of the verses. I would recite with appropriate tune and also explain the meaning.

Famine in the year Dháthu:

Tamil Nadu was in the grip of a famine during the Dháthu year. During that period, Subramania Desikar arranged for the conversion of dryland cultivation into wetland cultivation in some tracts to provide some gainful em-

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ployment to the famine-stricken. He also arranged to set up special centres in many places to offer rice-gruel to the hungry.

Vedanáyakam Pillai composed a number of verses extolling this gesture of Desikar. Here is one such verse:

"*Eriyotha panja midankarai yotha thidangar pattrum*
Kariyoth thanapal uyirgalai pankak karámadikka
Ariyoth thanansub ramaniyaiya narichakram
Sariyath thanavava neendhidum pon vellich chak karamae.

(O Subramania!
Vishnu incarnate you are.
Hari's wheel fierce
Slayed alligator
That clenched the elephant.
And now
Gold and silver you shower
Saving lives countless
From the vice grip
Of famine the alligator.)

Sometimes he used to compose verses and send them to me with a covering letter requesting me to read it out to His Holiness. The letters would be in the form of verses. I invariably did his bidding.

Whenever some Mutt matter with legal implications had to be addressed or when a petition in English required to be drafted, Desikar would seek Vedanáyakam Pillai's counsel. That was not a time when lawyers frequented the Mutt. Subramania Desikar had the ability to sort out issues in a simple manner.

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His Affection for Me:

Whenever Vedanáyakam Pillai's counsel was sought on any matter, Desikar would mostly send me to him. I would meet him in his house at Máyuram, discuss the matter with him, have the matter suitably resolved and return to the Mutt. During such visits, I used to access Vedanáyakam Pillai's new compositions through his younger brother, savour it and also derive pleasure by reading them aloud. We would discuss matters related to Tamil learning and also dwell upon the great qualities of Pillaivál. Vedanáyakam Pillai was not given to talking much. His few words were always full of meaning. With his reputation for efficiency as an official, he had no need to curry favours with anyone. He tended to be reclusive and had very few acquaintances.

Thanks to my association with the Mutt, I had the opportunity to get acquainted with him. Initially I had my own concern as to how to deal with an official like him; soon enough that apprehension disappeared; he treated me with utmost kindness and consideration. These warm feelings grew steadily till the end of his days.

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67. CHANDRASEKARA KAVIRÁYA PANDITHAR

Subramania Desikar's affection for me had been on the increase and I could sense it in different ways. If he wanted to discuss something important with dignitaries in places like Kumbakonam, he sent me as his emissary.

A Tricky Situation:

As Kumbakonam had not then been linked by rail, I used to go there only on foot, a distance of about twelve miles. It was my job to meet the right people, discuss the relevant issues, ascertain additional requirements and return. If I had to stay overnight in Kumbakonam, my food became an issue. As I knew no one there, I would not visit any house for my meal. Had no money to eat in a mess. I would enquire whether there was any place where one could get free food.

There was a choultry in Abhimukeshwara Swámi Temple, east of Kumbakonam Mahámaha Theerthá where free food was served for pilgrims. I would eat there, blessing the benefactor who had established it. On occasions my discussions with a dignitary would drag on late. On such occasions the choultry would be closed and I had to go without my night meal.

Subramania Desikar must have thought that I would be getting all my requirements from the person I had gone

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to meet. As I used to receive all my requirements from the Mutt while at Thiruvávaduthurai, he could have imagined that I would be making necessary arrangements myself. The dignitaries I had gone to meet evidently thought that the Mutt would have lined up all my requirements. These assumptions on the part of the two parties are understandable. I chose not to raise this as an issue and consequently suffered. If they knew the truth both the parties would feel very sad. I decided that it would not be proper for me to raise the issue but only let them realize it by themselves. I only concentrated on my work on hand.

A New Scholar:

Thyágarása Chettiár of Kumbakonam had taken leave for six months from 1.8.1876. In the resultant vacancy they had appointed Thillaiyambur Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar who was working as Tamil Pundit in Chittoor High School. He had studied under Sri Vishága Perumál Iyer, a scholar of repute in Chennai. He had also published several texts authored by Sri Visága Peruamál Iyer: *Panja Lakshana Viná vidai*, *Bála Bodha Ilakkanam*, *Nannool Virutthi Urai*, *Yápperunkalak-Kárigai Urai*, *Thandialankára Urai* and *Vachanathi Málai*. He also collected stray verses prevalent in different parts of Tamil Nádu and published for the first time a compilation of stray verses.

Subramania Desikar was interested in meeting and conversing with Kavirája Pandithar who had spent a lot of time in Chennai and had moved closely with savants like Thándavaráya Mudaliár. It was a month since he had taken charge in Kumbakonam College. Having learnt about Subramania Desikar's scholarship and fine qualities, he was eager to have that great man's darshan. But he had his own reservations. 'I wonder if I can have easy access to a man

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of his stature. It is perhaps wiser to compose a Prabandam in his honour and then call on him with the text.' With this thought he composed a *Nánmani Málai* in honour of Subramania Desikar.

Desikar's Desire:

Subramania Desikar's desire to meet the Pandithar grew by the day. A savant by name Thándavaráya Thambirán was the Poet Laurette of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt and had also taught Tamil to Desikar; he had spent some time in Madras and had moved with many scholars there. Subramania Desikar had learnt about the glory of these scholars through that Thambirán. He was keen to know more about those scholars through Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar.

One day Desikar called me and told me that I should go up to Kumbakonam. I thought that, as usual, he was sending me there on some Mutt errand. But, he told me, "We want to meet Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar and talk to him. Please meet him, convey my desire and arrange to bring him here". I was touched that the Mutt Head did not find it beneath his dignity to seek out the friendship of a renowned scholar.

I also nursed a desire to get acquainted with Pandithar; so did the other students. He had collected and published *Thanippádal Thirattu* (Collection of Stray Verses) which had given me such joy during my early days. I immediately set out to Kumbakonam.

His Desire:

I met him at Kumbakonam and told him what my message was. He immediately replied, "I have committed an act of discourtesy. I had already heard a lot about the Head of the Mutt. As soon as I landed in Kumbakonam, I nursed

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a desire to call on him and pay my respect. I have also composed a Prabandam in his honour." He enquired about Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt, Subramania Desikar and Pillaivál. He lapped up the details with great pleasure. He added, "I have to attend the college today. I'll definitely come there on Saturday morning and pay my respects to Sannidánam. Please inform him accordingly".

I returned to Thiruvávaduthurai by three in the afternoon and informed Desikar of what transpired. True to his word, Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar reached Thiruvávaduthurai on Saturday morning; his son Sivagurunátha Pillai also came with him. He and Desikar were engaged in a lively conversation. Desikar enquired about savants such as Visáka Perumál Iyer, Saravana Perumál Iyer, Mahálinga Iyer, Thándavaráya Mudaliár and Rámánuja Kaviráyar. Pandithar highlighted their qualities of head and heart and also narrated interesting incidents in their lives.

Nánmani Málai:

That afternoon Pandithar read out and conducted a discourse on the Nánmani Málai (Garland of Four Jewels) he had composed on Desikar and also brought it out in print. The event was attended by the Thambiráns of the Mutt, the other students, Madurai Rámasámi Pillai and a few other scholars. Subramania Desikar's name did not figure explicitly in each of the verses in the text; the Thambiráns found this lapse improper and unacceptable. One Sadagopácháriár, the Sanskrit Pundit of Kumbakonam Town High School, was present in the gathering. He posed a question to Pandithar: "Listen, why are you keeping silent? You can as well take this text to some other Mutt Head and read it out. Should there not be evidence in every stanza that it relates to this particular Mutt?" I was perturbed at his curt manner. But,

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Kavirája Pandithar remained stoic while he had the necessary skill to give an effective answer to the insinuation. He was not inclined to generate a controversy on this score.

Eulogies:

The public recital of Nánmani Málai was completed. The next day Pandithar recited many new verses he had composed in Desikar's honour. I then composed a verse in praise of Pandithar and recited it:

Vatrá varutsub ramaniap peyar vallal malarp
Potrát pughaipal paamálaiyáp punaindazhagá
Sottrá niyar Chandrasekara panditha sugunan
Satrái bavargalum mutrá magizhvu thalaikkolavae.

(To the great delight
Of even greenhorn scholars,
Chandrasekara Pandithar
Of erudition and nobility
Has woven a garland of poetry
To be offered
At the golden feet
Of Subramania
Of boundless benevolence.)

Subramani Desikar hinted his appreciation. Pandithar, in turn, recited a verse expressing his praise for me.

"*Nemi náthanvazhuthum minthan kailaiyurai*
Vámi náthan pughazhai vázhthu menmel thominarcheer
Sáminátha k kavignan sátrum panuvalaip pola
Páminá lumpagar valo?

(Can even Devi Saraswathi
Compose a verse to match
The flawless piece of Sáminátha n?

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Praise he has showered on me -
A supplicant
Singing the praise
Of Shivá of Kailásh
Who is worshipped by Vishnu.)

Pandithar's peace had been disturbed by the questions hurled by the Thambiráns and Sadagopácháriár. Now he was very pleased with my panegyric. That indeed was the purpose of my composition.

What the Thambiráns said:

When we were all leaving from the Mutt, they started criticizing the Pandithar to me. "What big blooming Pandithar is he? The grass on the other side is perhaps green. How come Sannidánam and you have developed a fancy for him? Not one of his verses had life in it. His verses were not meant to shower genuine praise on you. His whole idea seems to be to prove to the Sannidánam that he could also extemporaneously compose a verse in response to yours. That poem about you - was it truly in your praise? Is there any merit in it? In fact, it contains a hidden praise of himself. Further, the rhyme in the last line is faulty."

I tried to silence them. "It is improper to show disrespect to scholars. What would he think of this Ádheenam? Did he remain silent because of his inability to answer you effectively? We can find this form of composition in some old texts. You don't seem to realize his greatness. He had studied under a very illustrious savant."

Pandithar stayed on in Thiruvávaduthurai for a few days. During that period, I could learn many rare things from him. He got his doubts about Shástrás clarified with Desikar. He mentioned to me that he was planning to compile and publish another collection of stray verses; he re-

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quested me to assemble the stray verses known to me and send them to him for inclusion in the second collection. Desikar treated him with proper respect when he left.

Kaviráyar:

When he was in Kumbakonam, Kavirája Pandithar visited Thiruvávaduthurai on a few occasions. In later days I continued to be in correspondence with him. As he had wished I wrote down many stray verses and sent them to him for possible inclusion in the second collection. Some of my verses were also there. He included all those verses in the second volume. He had published my verses under the caption 'Composed by Thiruvávaduthurai Sáminátha Kaviráyar'. On seeing this, Subramania Desikar quipped with a smile, "He appears to have given the caption without regard for tradition." We joined his laughter. Some of my friends used to tease me thereafter by calling me, "Kaviráyarvál', or 'The Honoured Poet'.

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68. THIRISIRAPURAM GOVINDA PILLAI

When Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar, a few Thambiráns and I were critically studying Kamba Rámáyanam, some doubts cropped up. We were at a loss as to how to get these doubts resolved. We heard that one scholar by name Thirisirapuram Govinda Pillai was an expert in teaching Kamba Rámáyanam.

'The Supremo of Erudition': (Vidwatjana Sekarā)

He had published the entire Kamba Rámáyanam; had published Sundara Kándam with his own commentary; had earned the title Vidwathjana Sekará (The Supremo of Erudition); was deeply versed in Divya Prabhandá commentaries and texts of Srivaishnavá tradition. We thought we would vastly benefit if we could get him to Thiruvávaduthurai to teach us Kamba Rámáyanam. Those days he used to live in a place called Kapisthalam north of Pápanásam. We learnt that he was teaching a wealthy man there by name Duraisámi Moopanár; after completing some Tamil texts, he was teaching him Kamba Rámáyanam.

At an opportune moment we submitted to Subramania Desikar that Govinda Pillai was in Kapisthalam and that we were eager to study Kamba Rámáyanam under him. Desikar had already learnt about Govinda Pillai's expertise. As he had not visited the Mutt till then, Desikar had not

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got acquainted with him. Desikar was ever so eager to do everything to promote the development of students. So he immediately sent a suitable emissary to Moopanár to invite Govinda Pillai to Thiruvávaduthurai, stay there for some time and conduct discourses on Kamba Rámáyanam to the students there.

My Excitement:

Moopanár appraised Govinda Pillai of the greatness of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt and arranged to send him to Thiruvávaduthurai with all facilities. A Sri Vaishnavá saṿant from Therezhundur also accompanied him. Subramania Desikar arranged for them proper accommodation, provisions for food, and also assigned an official to oversee all the arrangements. He also directed me to keep a tab on the arrangements. I was excited that I could get acquainted with this scholar and learn a lot of useful things.

The day after his arrival, Govinda Pillai called on Subramania Desikar and told him that he was extremely pleased with the institutional arrangements at the Mutt and the kind of students there. Desikar requested him to recite some section of Kamba Rámáyanam and explain its meaning. Accordingly he started with the first verse of '*Kátchippadalam*' from *Sundara Kándam*. I sat by his side and read out the verses. As he was quite deaf, I found it difficult to read it loud enough to reach his ears. On the top of it, he would often growl, "Why don't you read aloud so that I can hear?"

Hatred of Music:

He was not pleased that I was reading out the verses in a melodious manner. He chided me: "Why are you muddling things with music? Is this a musical concert?" He read

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the verse with a tone common in Thirisirapuram and other places and told me, "This is the way to read out the verses." I smiled within myself. 'I thought only Pillaivál was an enemy of music. This person too appears to belong there.' I was familiar with the tone adopted by him. Pillaivál and Thyágarása Chettiár used to recite verses only in that tone. So I had some practice in that kind of reading. So I read out the verses in the same tone. "Well, this is the way a verse should be read." I got his approval.

"Come on. Sáminathayyar seems to be familiar with this melody too," Desikar said with a smile.

"I had no opportunity to use this mode. It has happened only now," I said. I realized that Desikar had used the 'melody' only with a touch of sarcasm.

Having read out the verses loudly to reach Govinda Pillai's ears, I developed a sore throat on the first day itself. He continued his discourse on Kamba Rámáyanam. He also cited parallels from the Divya Prabandam commentaries. They were couched in *Manipravála* style interspersed with Sanskrit loan words. Desikar relished it a lot. He was also interested in those commentaries. He used to get scholars versed in SriVaishnavá texts, get them to dwell upon these commentaries and reward them handsomely.

Bicephalous Ruby ('Iruthalai Mánikkam'):

One day Subramania Desikar requested Govinda Pillai to subject us to a test. He asked each one of us a few questions on the Grammar and Literature texts. When my turn came, he asked me to recite a verse: '*Odhakke Nenjae*' from '*Nootrettu Thiruppathi Andháthi*' and explain its meaning. A term '*Anjai Mámaniyai Potru*' occurs in that verse. I gave the meaning as follows: "Anjai = Five weapons of Vishnu. Mámaniyai = Kausthabam worn on his holy chest, Potru =

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Pay Homage. At once he stopped me with a wave of hand. "This is not the correct explanation. '*Anjai*' should be split as 'Anju' and 'I'. and, deal with *Mámani* separately. This means the great manthra called '*Iruthalai Mánikkam*' or 'Bicaphelous ruby' with twenty-five syllables." We listened with astonishment at his explanation.

"Do you realize the merit of listening to those deeply versed in 'Sampradáyá' or esoteric traditions?" Desikar told us and praised the savant.

Secluded Place:

Next morning, Govinda Pillai told me that he wanted to go out for a while and asked me to send someone to accompany him. I sent one Ramakrishna Pillai who was then studying under me. That boy followed the SriVaishnavá tradition and always wore the 'Thirumann' mark on his forehead. He would feel very uneasy whenever portions appeared in the text critical of SriVaishnavá traditions. I would try to pacify him. "This is the silly way when persons of one sect abuse another sect. Let's ignore this and savour only the literary merit."

As the Mutt was all Saivite with no trace of Vaishnavism, he was longing for the company of some Vaishnavá. When Govinda Pillai arrived at the Mutt, he felt like a person dying of thirst coming across a glass of sweet beverage. He used to tail him like a shadow wherever he went. He would wait on his lips and lap up whatever he said. He accompanied Govinda Pillai with considerable reverence. "Let it be a lonely place not frequented by people," said Pillai. "Sure, Ayyá" said Ramakrishna Pillai, and showed him the way. He thought that his teacher was seeking a secluded place to answer the Nature's call. But, the teacher was urging him off and on, "How long more to go?"

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"Here we are, Ayyá", said the student and took him to a grove called Laksha Thoppu about a mile away.

Having been tired out by his long walk, the teacher was curious, "I only wanted a secluded place to enjoy a cigar. Instead of showing me a suitable spot nearby, you have dragged me so far." He vented his anger by administering a few blows with his walking stick.

'O my god! Whoever knows your cigar habit..' Ramakrishna Pillai mumbled to himself and ran back. Govinda Pillai finished his job and returned. His anger was still lingering. He shouted at me, "Should you choose to send a confounded fool to accompany me? He has put me to considerable hardship." As I had already learnt this story from Ramakrishna Pillai I tried to assuage the teacher's anger. He appeared sapped out after a long walk in the sun. He was in no mood to get appeased.

When he was coming in the afternoon to see Desikar, he was fidgeting with his walking stick and looking around. "What are you looking for?" I asked him. "I am looking for that brat. I'll tell Sannidánam and have him driven out of this place." I quietly sneaked out of the place, went towards Ramakrishna Pillai and warned him to disappear from the scene. Poor he! He was ever so eager to pour out his grievances and thoughts to a sympathetic Vaishnavite. He did meet a Vaishnavite, alright. But it ended as a disaster. Desikar too came to know of it later.

Questioning Students:

Govinda Pillai spent a few days in Thiruvávaduthurai teaching us Kamba Rámáyanam. We could learn many new things when he expatiated on SriVaishnavá tradition. We were not particularly excited when he dealt with other matters. Sometimes Thambiráns raised some questions in the

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pretext of getting their doubts clarified in respect of other texts. Govinda Pillai would get stumped to find appropriate answers; or would say something unrelated. With their pride in having studied under the great Pillaivál, some of these Thambiráns derived perverse pleasure in putting their new teacher in a fix.

The elderly teacher, unable to field some of these questions raised by the youngsters in their zeal, would tell them, "You had learnt under the feet of the great Meenákshisundaram Pillai. Even when he was in Thirusirapuram he was a scholar in his own right. After coming here, he matured further by studying the works by the likes of Sivagnyána Swámigal. There is, in fact, no need for me to take lessons for you. By reading once or twice, you can learn things by yourselves"

"I have heard that Pillaivál had learnt under you. Is it true?" I asked him.

"No, it is a lie. He was older and was much more erudite." He replied.

Taking Leave:

As a Vaishnavite, he found it somewhat difficult to move in that essentially Saivite environment. On the top of it, he was also embarrassed by the questions frequently raised by the Thambiráns. So he was not inclined to stay there any longer. He sent word to Desikar that he wanted to return to his place. Taking the hint, Desikar honoured him with a ceremonial shawl and also presented him with honorarium, and gave him leave with a request that he may visit the Mutt often. Govinda Pillai returned to Kapisthalam.

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69. RÁO BAHADUR THIRU PATTÁBHIRÁMA PILLAI

A dignitary by name Rao Bahadur Thiru Pattábhirá-ma Pillai of Thiruchiráppalli was well-known to my Master. His native place was Thiruvatteeswaram Pettai. Thanks to his learning, perseverance and noble qualitie, he rose from a humble position to the reputed office of Deputy Collector. His superiors had a special regard for him and his subordinates were in awe of him.

He was well trained in Tamil and respected Tamil scholars. Wherever he went, he sought out the Tamil scholars there and engaged in lively discussions with them.

He had a reputation in the official circles for his strictness. But he would not hesitate to encourage and help hard-working subordinates. He was a Vaishnavite and a very devout person. He had compassion for the poor and was of munificent disposition.

He was very devoted to Mahá Vidwán Pillaivál. He had learnt through Pillaivál about the eminence of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt and Subramania Desikar's noble qualities. When we were in Thiruvávaduthurai, he worked in Thirisirapuram as Huzur Shreshtakar, a senior Treasury official. One day he visited Thiruvávaduthurai with some of his friends.

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His Amazement:

Pattábhiráma Pillai had moved with many government officials and had acquired administrative ability to handle major matters. Even so, he was amazed at the administrative structure of the Ádheenam and the meticulous manner in which poojás, charities and educational service were being organized and administered at the Ádheenam. "There is no police force here; no pomp; still all the work is carried out like clockwork. What involvement and enthusiasm in matters concerning learning! In what respect and awe they hold their leader!" He was all praise. Having learnt about Subramania Desikar's intellectual prowess, purity of conduct and benign nature, he praised: " A place presided over by such a person should be endowed with these qualities. If only we had a few such persons in Tamil Nadu, our language and culture would reclaim the glory of the past."

Attempt at a Dictionary:

While speaking to Desikar, he told him that Tamil language required a good dictionary and that Pillaivál's services may be utilized to accomplish this task. Desikar agreed to do so. But this idea did not come to fruition.

Since then, whenever he visited those parts, Pattábhiráma Pillai would come to Thiruvávaduthurai and have lively discussions with Subramania Desikar.

A Song of Welcome:

During the beginning of Purattási month in Dáthu year (September 1877), he had come to Thiruvávaduthurai. He was delighted to find a large number of students. He was very satisfied on testing their level of learning. As desired by Desikar, each student was asked to compose a poem about him. Here is the verse I had composed:

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"Kár nokki nirkku mayilpola kádhalandran
Ther nokki nirkku madandhaiyar pola thigaipparavi
Pár nokki nirkku Pattábhiráma Parákrama
Naer nokki nindranam yánagalel lánin nighazhvávae."

(Like a peacock
Eagerly watching
The approaching rain,
Like a damsel
Planting a longing look
At the chariot of her beloved
Who had departed....
Waiting are we
For your arrival,
O Great Pattábhirámá,
Standing majestic
Guarding the realm).

Pattábhiráma Pillai was pleased like punch on hearing these verses and reminded Desikar of his earlier request. "There are so many students here. Should Sannidánam so desire, we can bring out the dictionary soon... Pillaivál would have well accomplished this useful work. He has spent his entire life composing Puránás and Prabandams. If only great savants come forward to accomplish tasks useful to the society, Tamil will be greatly benefited. "Desikar agreed to look into the matter and bade him goodbye.

Letter in Verse:

On returning to Thirisirapuram, Pattábhiráma Pillai composed four verses expressing his pleasure on visiting Thiruvávaduthurai and reminding about his earlier request, got them printed and sent them to Subramania Desikar. Here are those verses:

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Iniya Thamizh Nadengum inguleesu paravi Thamizh ketra mindri
Kaniyagandra mápola kavidap pettriruppadhaiyán kan dátrádhu
Muniyinruk konda vundran mundrilidai muthamizhum muzhangu mendrae
Thaniyuru Subramania Desiká ninaiyandru dharisithenae.

(Downhearted am I to see
English's omnipresence
In the land of Tamil sweet,
Lo! Like a mango tree sans fruits
Tamil stands forsaken
That day
I had your darshan,
O! unique Subramania Desiaka
Of saintliness pristine
In whose courtyard
Ring aloud the Three Tamils.)

Dharisithavandru kandaen Tamizhmadanthai thalirthu lagil thanper nátti
Parisupera ninaiyadaindhu palavárái muyalvadhuvum
Párin Mannar Dharisiká maniyae nee Thamizhmayilai káppadhuvum Thamizhar yárkkum
Poruvil Pándiyan Sozhan Seranena vayangumunaip
Punithan endrum

(There
I savoured the sight
Of Damsel Tamil
Holding her banner aloft.
There you shone
As the 'Crown jewel'

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Worn with pride
By Pándya, Chola, Chera monarchs
Praising you
For nurturing peacock Tamil.

There
Scholars myriad
Trooped unto you
Collecting rewards.)

"Agarádhi Thamizhilinai yatradhena viyappuravonn
Andror yárum
Pagarádhi ruthalinin párilula Thamizhmadappann
Navarkat kellám
Nigará dhirukkumnedum pazhiyendru munpugandru
Nediya seettu
Thagarádhi rukkumoru sirukuzhaiyil ittanuppith
Thalarvái nindren."

(With anguish over
Savants many
Not concerned about
The absence of a Tamil dictionary
I've sent epistles long
To Mutt Heads far and wide.
To wipe out this reproach.
And here am I
Waiting forlornly.)

'Thalarndhurugi Samusayathál látrenái Thirumugathai
Dharisithaen kán.
Valarndhongu madhiyudaiyái Gnánikatgor tháyagamae
Vallale yun
Kilarvasanath thátralarndhen kettiyena nichayithen
Kettuk konda valam váindha vagarádhi varu mendrae
Thirumbinan kán vanappin mikkoi.

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(One with wisdom lofty
Sanctuary of savants
Paragon of munificence!
Tired out and downhearted,
I saw your face benign
Heard your words balmy
Sanguine am I
The dictionary is coming
So do I return,
You, Exquisite One!)

We were all filled with amazement on reading these letters. Though these verses did not have the ring of scholarly compositions, they brought to light Pattábhiráma Pillai's love for Tamil. Is it not a wonder that a high government official should have the ability to compose verses suffused with great love for Tamil.

After the receipt of the letter, Subramania Desikar discussed the dictionary project with us for a few days. The palm manuscript and the printed version of the dictionary (Sathuragarádhi) composed by Father Beschi alias Veeramá Munivar were brought for review. We also retrieved the palm-leaf manuscripts of *Nigandu*, dusted them and put them together. This interest continued for a few days. Then all talk of dictionary ceased. Only when Pattabhiráma Pillai figured in a conversation, we would start wondering what to tell him if he raised the subject again.

The Thambiráns' Recommendations:

Those days some of my students including Vishwalinga Thambirán used to render the service of massaging the

(Thirusirapuram, Kali 1978, Daathu year, Purattaasi month, 13th day – 27-9-1877)

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feet of Subramania Desikar while he was taking the daily siesta after lunch. On those occasions, Desikar would enquire about the progress of lessons. He would also raise some questions about some aspects of the texts. When Desikar was pleased with the replies, the Thambiráns would wait for an opportune moment to raise a matter concerning me. I understand they would urge the Sannidánam that I should be kept permanently in Thiruvávaduthurai, a house should be built for my use and that I should be paid appropriate monthly remuneration. When he saw me, Desikar would happily refer to my student-Thambiráns' entreaties that all necessary facilities should be established for me. Then he would exhort me to continue to be a good teacher.

Those words filled me with happiness. I was not unduly concerned about the fruition of Thambirán's requests. I was pleased about their concern for me and was satisfied that my efforts had not gone in vain.

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70. NEW HOUSE

There is an Agraháram at the northern side of the temple tank in Thiruvávaduthurai. . A convenient two - storeyed house was constructed at the southern end of the northern row in the Agraháram.

Desikar had good materials sent from the Mutt for the construction. On completion of the construction work, Desikar himself inspected it in person. No one evidently knew as to why the house was being built. Only the Thambiráns felt elated that the time had come for their request to get fulfilled. I too could somehow guess what the house was for.

My Parents Arrived:

One day Desikar asked me, "Your father had told me that he would come back after visiting his village. Why hasn't he returned yet?"

"They are living there with support from friends in those parts."

"You write a letter to your parents immediately requesting them to come back here. It is not proper that they live away from you during their old age."

What Desikar said was indeed true. I was also sad at being separated from them. But I did not have the courage to seek a remedy. I should either go to their place and live

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there or they should join me at this place. Desikar's directive filled me with joy. I wrote to my father. My parents arrived in Thiruvávaduthurai in a week.

Domestic Life:

I realized only then how considerate Desikar had been in offering that counsel. I was profoundly moved by his affection and concern that I should start living in the new house, under the benevolent care of my parents. Not only that. I also realized that he wanted me to start my regular family life and that I should become a permanent resident of Thiruvávaduthurai. I took it as a blessing and a good fortune.

Desikar had access to considerable material and human resources; at the same time his heart was ever full of kindness. It was his nature to help others and derive pleasure therefrom. The pleasure one gains by giving is greater than the pleasure derived by the receiver. Thiruvalluvar has expressed this sentiment so beautifully.

"*Eethuvakku minbam ariyárkol thammudamai*
Vaithizhakkum vanka navar.

(Hard-hearted ones hoard but to lose,
Know not the joy of giving.)

I found the true meaning of this Kural verse in Desikar's action.

We started living in the new house in the Kárthigai month of Eswara Year (November, 1877). This left me happy, but the happiness of my parents was manifold. Till then they had led an itinerant and unsettled life moving from place to place, shifting from house to house. This new life

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which was a promise of stability lent them considerable joy. I started life as a married man. All the items required for the family came from the Mutt. Initially some officials of the Mutt tended to be jealous that a stranger was having access to all such facilities. It is not uncommon to find such petty-minded people in great institutions. They also tried to put obstacles in our way. They did not supply the utensils required to set up a new house.

Ponnusámi Chettiár:

This matter somehow reached Subramania Desikar's ears. He called Mu. Ponnusámi Chettiár, a scribe in the Mutt and a student of mine. He gave Chettiár clear instructions: "You should ascertain from Sáminátha Iyer what he requires and when, keep me informed of the same and ensure that those are supplied to him in a timely manner. It is your responsibility to assess the requirements of the family." Ponnusámi Chettiár was a modest person and also a very affectionate person. He used to savour his involvement in Tamil texts. Also had the capacity to compose poetry. Many dignitaries often visited the Mutt. Chettiár always dealt with them with courtesy, bringing a good name to himself and to the Ádheenam.

He was known for his loyalty and devotion towards the Ádheenam. He dedicated his entire life at the service of Ádheenam. With Desikar entrusting the responsibility of my family welfare to him, he discharged his duties with considerable care and affection. Even a mere hint was enough for him to know our requirements and send the same to our house. Thanks to his direct intervention, the jealous meddlers could not succeed in their efforts. They were also afraid that they would come to harm if His Holiness got to know of their attitude. Gradually they were also rid of their

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jealousy. Each day all our requirements of food provisions and the like reached us in time from the Mutt.

Paddy and Money:

One day three bullock carts stopped in front of our house. Some persons brought two '*Kudirs*'(Large barrel-like receptacles for storing grains) and placed them inside the house. A few others brought sixty '*Kalams*' of paddy from the Mutt and poured thirty 'kalams' each into the two kudirs, and smeared them with mud. They left saying that it was being done at Sannidánam's direction. Ponnusámi Chettiár came a while later. He explained the position: "It is Sannidánam's order that sixty kalams of paddy should be sent to your house for the family's use. Sannidánam also feels that it would not be proper to be sending materials to your house on a daily basis, as is often done for occasional outside visitors, and that hereafter you should be treated as permanent members of our establishment. He has also asked me to hand over this amount for your other expenses." So saying, he handed over a sum of fifty rupees.

I felt overwhelmed. My father was then engaged in preparing sandal paste for his daily *Shivapoojá*. I handed over the money to him and stood there speechless. He received it and touched his eyes with it. "All due to the grace of Lord Parameshwará," he said and was lost in gratitude. That afternoon, my father met Subramania Desikar at the Mutt and acknowledged the receipt of paddy and money and expressed his great joy and gratefulness. At that point Desikar told him, "Even the officials of the Mutt are given five kalams of paddy as monthly remuneration. While I am inclined to give more to your family, this could be treated as a contravention of our tradition and give rise to avoidable controversy. Please use this amount suitably and we would

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send additional supplies as and when required. Don't worry about anything."

Thambiráns satisfied:

The sad times of my parents and I living separately came to an end. We got a permanent house, steady income and the association with a great institution. I became a person of Thiruvávaduthurai. My students were all very happy and satisfied. There was a reason for their satisfaction. My new life confirmed that I had become an inseparable part of the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt; and their sense of assurance that I would stay on there and not leave.

How Father Spent Time:

My father forgot all his worries and spent time happily, performing his Shivapoojás and singing keerthanás. The need to sing merely to chase money disappeared. Whenever he had leisure time and enthusiasm, he would lose himself in singing songs. Whenever a music vidwán visited the Mutt, they used to call on my father. Whenever there was a music concert at the Mutt Desikar would send word for my father so that he could savour the music.

Whenever great musicians such as Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and Thirukodikkával Krishna Iyer came to the Mutt, they invariably visited my father. Once Thyágarája Shástri had come from Pudukkottai. During the conversation he told Desikar that he would go to my father and listen to a couple of keerthanás and leave. He would greatly enjoy the session, requesting my father to sing two or three particular keerhtanás. Not only that; he would heap praise on each rendition. He had not listened to many keerthanás of Ganam Krishna Iyer. So he would mostly urge my father to sing those pieces. While listening to *Padhams* with *Nāyaka-*

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Nāyaki Bhává he would explain in sheer ecstasy "What rare beauty ! What great melody!"

Thirukodikkával Krishna Iyer was a renowned violin vidwán. He used to accompany Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer. He learnt many Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás from my father. A Nágaswara vidwán of Thiruvávaduthurai by name Kuzhandaivelan also learnt many fine keerthanás from my father and played them in his concerts. The music aficionados found a new style in these pieces, found out that he had learnt them from my father, and would call on my father and enjoy some of these keerthanás. There was a spurt in the demand for Ganam Krishna Iyer's keerthanás.

Thus, by god's grace everyone in our family got blessed with a fulfilling and happy life..

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71. LAUDATORY VERSES

One Paramasiva Thambirán was a devotee of Dharmapura Ádheenam, an accomplished Tamil scholar and had lived in Benares for a few years. He became a great devotee of Subramania Desikar and lived mostly in Thiruvávaduthurai, with the permission of the Head of Dharmapura Ádheenam. Desikar also had special affection for him. While at Thiruvávaduthurai, he was researching in great Tamil texts and also teaching students. He was learning a few Tamil texts and *Saiva Shástrás* from Desikar and from the vidwáns of the Mutt. He was a good speaker. Also had the proficiency to compose Tamil verses. Had a sharp intellect and attractive looks.

Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar and I once learnt under him the entire *Nannool Virutthi Urai* text. As he had studied *Sanskrit Vyákaranam* (grammar) he could clearly explain many subtle points. While learning under him, we realized that, howevermuch one has studied, one can't claim to have mastered any subject.

Mummani Kovai:

Paramasiva Thambirán, a devotee of Subramania Desikar, had composed *Mummani Kovai* in praise of Desikar. This Prabandam was first launched in the presence of Desikar. Together with a benedictory verse, it contained 31

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verses. Ten persons had composed 26 verses in praise of that composition. They were also included in that Prabandam. It was printed and published by Thillaiambur Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar. At that time, a few Thambiráns and students had composed laudatory verses. In the publication, the name of the author and his special qualifications were also mentioned at the top of each laudatory verse.

One such entry ran as follows: "This is an '*Arisikkazhi Nediladi Âsiriya Viruttham*' composed by Shanbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar, one of the disciples of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam and a descendent of Thirukooda Rásappa Kaviráyar of Melagaram in the Pandyá Land".

My Verses:

I had also composed two laudatory verses. I had been at a loss as to how to express my enormous debt of gratitude to Subramania Desikar who had lavished so much of affection on me. This laudatory verse provided me with the opportunity. In the second verse I referred to the munificence of Desikar, who had blessed me with material and intellectual assistance. It ran as follows:

"*Thaenáttu malarpozhiirko Muthiyir Subramania*
Deva nennai thae nätta viruporulum orungarul dhayánid hiyin
Salasath thánnmel
Vánátti namudheippa Mummanikkovaiyai navitri
Vanaindhán yárum
Menáttu nayasugunap Paramasiva Munivaravith
Thuvasing gaerae."

(Beloved of all
Of qualities noble
Titan among poets,

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Paramasiva Thambirán
Offered the Mummani Kovai
Delectable as heavenly nectar
At the lotus feet
Of Subramania Devar
Of Thiruvávaduthurai
Where groves are full
Of flowers abounding with honey.
His Grace
Lavished on me
Wealth and learning.)

Poet Laureate:

While referring to my name at the top of my verse, Subramania Desikar stated that I should be referred to as 'Âdheena Vidwán'(the Poet Laureate of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam). I was not inclined to agree to this and said, "I am not in the least qualified to bear the title adorned once by Pillaivál. I would rather deem it an honour that I am a humble student of Sannidhánam."

"While you object to this title, you cannot stop me in another matter, " said Desikar. I humbly asked him what the matter was.

"Your name should only appear as Thiruvávaduthurai Sáminátha Iyer."

"Your Holiness has already made me an integral part of the Mutt. So, the name you have suggested would be very appropriate." I replied.

At the top of my verse, the following title was appended: "This is an *Arisikazhi Nediladi Ásiriya Viruttham* composed by Thiruvávaduthurai Sáminátha Iyeravargal, a student of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheena Mahá Sannidánam

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and the son of Venkatasubbu Iyeravargal."

My new name as Thiruvávaduthurai Sáminátha Iyer thus got stuck to me since. While Thiruvávaduthurai is only the name of a place, I felt elated as if I had been conferred an honorific title by prefixing it to my name.

I was overjoyed when Subramania Desikar wanted me to be referred to as Poet Laureate of Ádheenam. This revealed to me Desikar's good opinion about me. Though my name was not referred to in this manner in the printed version of Mummani Kovai, Desikar ensured that his wish was fulfilled later. After I got employed in Kumbakonam College, he used to refer to me as 'Our Ádheenam's Poet Laureate' and 'Our Ádheenam's Distinguished Poet Laureate' in the letters he wrote to me and in the front pages of the books he sent me.

Venuvana Linga Vilásam:

Those days, the courtyard of the Audience Hall of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt was a large and beautiful thatched pandal. Venuvana Linga Thambirán, who was then the Mutt superintendent in Javanthipuram, wanted to convert this pandal as a wooden structure similar to the one at Kovilpatti, and was taking necessary steps in this regard. On hearing this, the zamindárs of Setroor and Sivagiri sent the required teakwood for this purpose. Many carpenters were requisitioned from around Thirunelveli.Pudhiyavan Ácháriyár, as the lead architect, took considerable interest in ensuring the smooth progress of the work. The work went on for a year. The structure was built as a vast dome without supporting pillars or columns. In honour of the Thambirán who had taken the initiative in this project, it was named as '*Venuvana Linga Vilásam*'.

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The Hall was declared open on the 1st of Thai month in Eshwara year. The function was attended by many dignitaries and scholars from surrounding villages and towns. As the Hall was the first of its kind in Cholá land, many visitors thronged during the event just to have a look at it. On the inner panel of the upper loft of the Hall, pictures were painted depicting the lives of Náyanmárs and Thiruvilaiyádal stories. On the day of inauguration, there was the feeding of Brahmins at noon; special Maheshwara Poojá and a ceremonial procession at night were also notable features. The Thambiráns and others composed verses in praise of the Hall. On the completion of the ceremonial procession at night, Subramania Desikar came and occupied the Seat of Honour in the Audience Hall. As per his wish, I read out the laudatory verses on Venuvana Linga Vilásam. All the Thambiráns had assembled there. Sri Ramalinga Thambirán, who was then the Head of the Thiruppananthál Kási Mutt, was also present.

Laudatory Verses:

The Thambiráns and others had individually composed laudatory verses. They tried to outwit each other in their own literary finesse. They had kept their compositions confidential, without showing it to others. Their idea was to surprise the assembly with their new compositions and reap praise. I must confess that I was no different.

Paramasiva Thambirán, Kumárasámi Thambirán and Madurai Rámasámi Pillai handed over their verses to me. I took them together and started reading out. There were thirty verses in all. I read out each verse with a suitable melody and also highlighted some of the finer points in the verses. I also read out the three verses I had composed. In one of the verses I had stated, "This Mandap is called a Mandap with-

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out pillars (Kál), but, I would not say so. Because Thenkál (Breeze from the South) keeps wafting in this Mandap". The way I had cleverly played on the word 'Kál', implying its two meanings ('Pillar' and 'Breeze') was warmly appreciated by the audience.

On hearing this Subramania Desikar expressed his satisfaction: "Indeed good. They are all in Pillaivál's style." We couldn't have received a greater commendation. His praise received in the presence of a large gathering, gave us immense joy. We went to sleep that night with grateful thoughts of Pillaivál.

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72. THE HONOURS I RECEIVED

Venuvana Linga Thambirán, the senior superintendent for the southern region had constructed a large beautiful Mutt in Sevanthipuram near Ambásamudram and named it 'Subramania Desika Vilásam'. He later visited Thiruvávaduthurai and made a submission to Desikar: "Sannidánam should honour Sevanthipuram with a visit along with His holy retinue, spend a few days there and also inspect the villages."

At that time, in the Thai month of Eshwara year, Pynágaram family of Amarávathipudhur had arranged for Mahá Kumbábishekam (a special consecration ceremony) at the Madurai Sri Meenákshisundareswarar Temple. They had also sent a special invitation to Subramania Desikar to honour the occasion.

Pilgrimage Arrangements:

In response to the requests of Thambirán and other wealthy Vaishyás of the area, Desikar decided to embark on a southern pilgrimage covering the Madurai Kumbábishekam and Sevanthipuram. Elaborate arrangements were made for the journey.

The dignitaries en route were appropriately notified. Some of the disciples wanted to come to Thiruvávaduthurai and participate in Desikar's southern pilgrimage. Subramania Desikar sent a letter to Chinnapattam (Junior Head of the Mutt) of Kallidaikurichi, Sri Namachiváya Desikar, to

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join the entourage at Madurai. Suitable arrangements were made to take care of all the requirements during the journey.

Taking Leave of Father:

Desikar told me, "We are undertaking the southern pilgrimage. On the way, many dignitaries and scholars would be calling on us for interesting discussions. You should also come. Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and his brother have informed us that they would join us at Madurai. I hope your mother and father would not have any problem in your accompanying us. We would direct the responsible people in the Mutt to take very good care of your parents." I was greatly interested in visiting new places and meeting new people. When arrangements were being made for the journey I had a doubt if they would take me also along. Desikar's words allayed my misgivings and filled me with joy. I told Desikar that my father would pose no objection to my joining the pilgrimage.

But, when I broached the matter with my father he felt somewhat disturbed. The steam trains had just started plying to Madurai. The pilgrims like me would have to take the train journey. My father would not board a train. So, the question of taking him along did not arise. It was, therefore, necessary to leave him in Thiruvávaduthurai during that period.

He was reluctant to part with me. "The people here treat me with civility and affection only because of their respect for you. When you are not around, I wonder if I would get proper treatment." "No need to worry. Suitable persons would continue to be at the Mutt to take care of daily poojás and other requirements. They have a proper sense of the status of people. They would sure take proper care of you. The superintendent would ensure this." I tried to assuage

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his feelings and gave him words of encouragement.

Necklace and Shawl:

Desikar commenced his pilgrimage with his retinue, the day before Poosam date in Thai month. The annual Brahmotsavam festival was then being celebrated in Thiruvidamarudhur. We went there on the Thaippoosam Day. He took part in the Temple Car Festival and ceremonially brought it to its stand. He gave me a canvas bag, a '*jamakkálam*' and a silk pillow for my journey. Then he seated me by his side and told me, "We may have to bother you when we go to different places during the pilgrimage. Many dignitaries with great love for Tamil would be calling on us. It would be your duty to recite Tamil verses to their satisfaction." "It would be my honour," I replied.

As directed by Desikar, a Thambirán brought a necklace with 'Gowrishankará' Rudhráksha beads and put it round my neck. He also wrapped around me a costly shawl. I was overwhelmed by this gesture; my hairs stood on end. "You better go to Thiruvávaduthurai and return after taking leave of your father. Then we would all travel together."

The gifts I received provided an indication that many benefits would come my way during the journey. Even though my father had already been informed about the pilgrimage, I thought Desikar wanted me to go to Thiruvávaduthurai so that my parents would be happy to know about the honour conferred on me. I went to Thiruvávaduthurai and showed the necklace and shawl to my parents; they were simply enthralled!

I took leave of them and returned to Thiruvidaimarudur. Desikar set out along with his retinue. Two carts had been arranged for me and a few other Brahmins. Two Brahmin boys also accompanied us to take care of the cooking

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en route. We joined Desikar's followers and the journey started.

Distinguished Visitors en route:

We stayed for a while in Álankudi; spent the night at Mullaiváyil and reached Mannárkudi the next morning. On knowing about Subramania Desikar's visit, the local dignitaries on the way called on Desikar and paid their respects. While at Mannárkudi, Desikar stayed at a choultry, specially decorated and got up for him. The Deputy Collector Rao called on Desikar and enquired about his welfare and other arrangements. Apart from those belonging to Saivite sect, people of other sects and government officials kept calling on Desikar and savoured conversations with him.

Venkat Rao, a friend of my father and a Munsiff in Mannárkudi, came to see Desikar. He was the person who had told my father when we were at Kumbakonam that there was no use in my studying Tamil and that I could derive benefits only through English learning. He was glad to see me with Desikar and told him, " I know him well. Ever since his boyhood, he had a great passion to learn Tamil. Please take care of him."

Whenever dignitaries called on Desikar, they would discuss on a variety of subjects. In between, I would recite Tamil verses and expatiate on their meaning. I would never fail to recite the poems on Subramania Desikar composed by Pillaivál and Vedanáyakam Pillai.

Earrings and Ring:

While we were in Mannárkudi, Desikar asked me to remove the old earrings I was wearing. Then he directed one Kasthuri Iyengár that I should be adorned with earrings set with rubies and with an ornamental fretted design all

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round. I had only minor holes in my ears caused by the old earrings. It was painful when the bigger earrings were inserted. 'Women happily wear bangles and other jewellery; what enormous endurance!' I tended to think. With blood oozing from my ears, Iyengár managed to insert the two earrings. When I told him that I would put them on later, he would not listen.

We left Mannárkudi. On the way, while at Pattukkottai, Desikar presented me with a ring and asked me to wear it. Then we went to Thiruperunthurai and spent a few days there. Subramania Thambirán, who was then a temple superintendent at Thirupperunthurai, had made special arrangements for Desikar's visit and looked after us with great care.

Ponnánkál:

At one point during our journey, Desikar's palanquin moved at a somewhat faster pace. We got left behind. After a while, we noticed that Desikar was relaxing on the banks of a stream in the shade provided by trees with rich foliage. A few new dignitaries were with him. A few salvers - full of different kinds of fruits, betel leaves, araca nuts, candies and other things - were placed there. On another silver salver there was a heap of money.

When we got down from our carts and reached Desikar, he pointed to the dignitaries and introduced them to us. "They belong to the lineage of Amuda Kaviráyar who had composed a *Thurai Kovai* in honour of Rámanáthapuram Raghunátha Sethupathi and received four hundred golden lemon fruits as gift. This place is the 'Ponnánkál' (The Golden Creek) village gifted by King Sethupathi to Amudhakaviráyar for the *Kovai* he had composed.

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As I was with Subramania Desikar during the entire period of the pilgrimage, I had occasions to observe his great qualities. He would occasionally speak humorously and cause merriment. He would explain the historical details about the holy sites en route, as also many other historical events. He would often enquire and ensure that all the food arrangements are well and truly in place.

Thus, each day rolled on joyously and the mind was pleasantly occupied on seeing new places and meeting new people. Gifts such as the necklace, the shawl, the earrings and the ring, the kind words of Desikar and the lovely scenes I saw on the way, left me exhilarated and made me a new man.

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73. 'I AM THE EXAMPLE'

Subramania Desikar and his retinue went via Ezh-uporkottai and had darshan at holy sites such as Kálayár Kovil. Then we reached Thiruppuvanam near Madurai and stopped there. While learning under Pillaivál and while studying Theváram and Puránás of holy sites, I had learnt about the history of many sacred Saivite places of worship. Pillaivál and those acquainted with him had a special liking to visit and have darshan at the holy sites of Saivism. As I had moved in that group, whenever I had a chance to have darshan at a Shivá temple, I would recall details about those sacred sites and also try to collect more interesting information.

Entering the Pandyá Land:

When we crossed the Chola territory and entered the Pándya land, Desikar told us, "Till now you had seen only Cholá land. Now you can see the wealth of the Pándya land." There was a ring of enthusiasm in his voice. It was but natural, as he belonged to Pándyá land.

As I had studied Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam many times and had also been involved in discourses on the subject, I had already known well the glory of the Pándyá land. On hearing that we were nearing the Pándyá country, I was also elated. On reaching Thiruppuvanam, I was pleased to see that holy site and the Vaigai river. I worshipped the Lord

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bearing the scar on his cheek caused by a passionate kiss from Ponnanaiyál, a courtesan. My interest to see Madurai kept increasing.

On learning that Subramania Desikar was camping at Thiruppuvanam, many dignitaries from Madurai as also the Chettiárs who had undertaken the renovation of Madurai temple, came there to pay respects to him.

Going to Madurai:

Desikar left Thiruppuvanam and camped with his retinue in a temple at the western bank of the Bandiyur temple tank in Madurai. There, one Ádhimoolam Pillai got the whole place elaborately decorated, had poojás meticulously performed, conducted special Maheshwara Poojá and also organized the feeding of thousands of poor. He was a big contractor; was of charitable disposition; was full of devotion to the Guru and Shivá. As a mark of the great regard the citizens of Madurai had for him, a street had been named as Ádhimoolam Pillai Street.

Next morning, the manager of the Collector's office, a very dignified person by name Venkatasámi Náidu and many other dignitaries led Desikar with due honours into the Madurai city. Desikar alighted at a choultry on the southern bank of the Vaigai river, specially arranged for his stay. The entire area was full of pavilions and shields, all grandly decorated.

Rice and other provisions arrived in cartloads from Thiruvávaduthurai, enough to feed thousands of people. The dense coconut groves lining the Vaigá banks and the vast sandy expanse and the water flow of the Vaigai river were alluring sights.

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The Arrival of Dignitaries:

At Desikar's invitation, many dignitaries arrived there and had lively discussions with him. They included Small Cause Court Judge Sir.T.Muthusámi Iyer, Judge Muthusámi Chettiár, Deputy Collector Suriyamoorthiyá Pillai and Thirumangalam Munsiff Krishansámi Rao (who had earlier been the Diwán of Thiruvananthapuram). Muthusámi Iyer's fame had by then spread to some extent. When I saw him for the first time, I was amazed to find his totally unassuming appearance and his soft manner of speaking.

Sri Namachiváya Desikar, the Junior Mutt Head at Kallidaikurichi, also reached there. Mahá Vaidyanáthayyar and his elder brother came from Thiruvaiyáru and stayed with Desikar. He entrusted me to them saying, "Please take care of him. He should be with us right through the pilgrimage." I was delighted at the prospect of having their company.

Splendour of the Consecration Ceremony:

Milling crowds had assembled to witness the Mahá Kumbhábhishekam, the grand consecration ceremony. The zamindárs and landed gentry from Kási to Kanyákumari had assembled there with their paraphernalia. The Who's Who of Tamil Nádu was in attendance there. Most of them called on Subramania Desikar. I was by his side, involved in reciting verses.

The Kumbábhishekam was conducted in time with due ceremony. Subramania Desikar went inside the temple and had his darshan. I also had the darshan with him. In the midst of this throng it was not possible to savour the true beauty of that temple. It was then that we met Mani Iyer for the first time. He was with us and facilitated a convenient Kumbhábhisheka darshan for Desikar and his retinue. In

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the few minutes we spent with Mani Iyer, we realized his energetic disposition and the regard people had for him.

Mani Iyer:

After the Kumbábhisheka darshan, Desikar returned to his quarters. Ever since meeting Mani Iyer, Desikar wanted to spend some time with him and engage in interesting discussions. He sent word to him through a Saivite person: "We are very eager to meet you and speak to you. We are not able to come there and see you. Every minute we are desirous of meeting you." Mani Iyer told the messenger that he was also very eager to call on His Holiness, informed the time of his visit, and came to Desikar's quarters punctually. Many had assembled there to see the great savant and to hear him. Desikar sent his representative to meet him half way and accord him a suitable welcome. The conversation commenced.

When these two giants _ Mani Iyer, the intellectual and Subramania Desikar, the great connoisseur _ met and were in a lively conversation, it brimmed with rapture. The persons who had assembled there were all ears. They lapped up the pleasure of the words with evident eagerness. When Mani Iyer was stating his position without mincing words and with the courage of his conviction, his self-assurance and commitment to truth came to the fore. Desikar lauded that savant with soft and pleasant words. He also regaled him reciting Sanskrit slokás and Tamil verses. As an aficionado of Literature, Mani Iyer enjoyed them immediately.

Vedanáyakam Pillai's Verse:

At that point I was hoping to get an opportunity to recite some verses in that large gathering and in the presence of Mani Iyer who represented the very soul of Madu-

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rai. Venuvana Linga Thambirán created that opportunity for me. "Máyuram Munsiff Vedanáyakam Pillai had composed many verses in honour of Mahá Sannidhánam", he said and looked at me. I immediately jumped into action. I recited some of Vedanáyakam Pillai's verses and dwelt on their meaning and the setting in which he had composed the verses. 'When am I going to be a part of such a distinguished assembly?' - my enthusiasm was on the rise. I recited the following verse and elaborated on its meaning:

Thadayil kodaisub ramani yaiyanir chárndhavarkoll
Kodayai avarsola vaendum kolovavar kutchisolum
Idaisolung kandamum kádhum solumiru máppudaiya
Nadaisolung kaiyir kudaisolum verenna nán soluvadhe.

(*O Subramania Gracious!*
Needless for the beneficiaries
Of your ceaseless bounties
To expatiate on these gifts.
Eloquent the message from
Their throats
Their ears
Their waists
Their well-fed bellies
Their fineries
Their proud stride
Their umbrellas
And
Why should I add to these?)

After my initial explanation of the verse, I added this personal note: "This verse outlines the different acts of munificence of Sannidánam. Many individuals had received each of these gifts separately. I am a standing example of a recipient of all these gifts combined. For many years I

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had been eating the food provided by the Mutt. The dress I'm wearing and the ones in my trunk are all Sannidánam's gifts. The necklace I'm donning, the earrings I'm wearing and the ring in my finger are all the gifts of His Holiness. So my stomach, waist, neck, ears and fingers sing the praise of Sannidánam's charity. But I do not have two items mentioned in Vedanáyakam Pillai's poems: the strut of self-importance and the umbrella in hand; I do not possess them nor do I wish to." This brief comment of mine elicited loud cheers from the assembly. I had the satisfaction of having accomplished something significant.

On listening to my little speech of sorts, Desikar broke into a gentle smile as a mark of his approval. I then thought that his smile should only signify his satisfaction. I didn't realize that it contained another hint; he had mentally noted my comment that I did not have an imperial gait and an umbrella. I came to know of it only later.

Mani Iyer took leave of us. Desikar continued his stay there for a few more days. Then he advised Mahá Vaidyanádhayyer, me and others to take the train to Thirunelveli and wait there, and that he would himself travel by road. Accordingly we reached Thirunelveli.

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74. THE FIRST BOOK I EDITED

There was a Mutt belonging to Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam on the West Car Street of Thirunelveli. It was called Eesána Madam. When Mahá Vaidyanatha Iyer and others reached Thirunelveli, Sáminátha Thambirán was the Junior Mutt Head there. We stayed there under his care and waited for Desikar's arrival.

Dispute:

Desikar arrived at Thirunelveli after having darshan at many Saivite holy sites. Many rich persons, dignitaries and scholars called on Desikar, bringing various kinds of gifts and oblations. Some of them presented new verses composed by them on Desikar. Rámasámi Kaviráyar of Setrur, Azhagiya Chokkanátha Pillai of Rájavallipuram and Devarája Bhárathi of Ázhwárthirunagari had come. Devarája Bhárathi recited some of his verses. I objected to some matters mentioned in the verses and raised some questions. He provided suitable replies. Till then, Desikar had not observed me raising such objections boldly with other scholars. Later he told me in private: "Your objections were appropriate. There is a tradition to reach suitable decisions after iterative discussions. Some scholars are known as critical disputants. If a discussion is conducted properly and without unnecessary wranglings, the listeners will find

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it agreeable, and the skills of the discussants will also become apparent. This tradition is very common in Sanskrit culture." Initially I had some misgivings about the propriety of my objections. Desikar's words set my misgiving at rest.

Kallidaikkurichi:

Later, on the invitation of the Junior Mutt Head Namachiváya Desikar, Subramania Desikar went to Kallidaikurichi with his retinue. A new Audience Hall had been constructed there in honour of his visit. Attached to the Mutt was a lovely Shivá temple, much like the one in Thiruvávaduthurai. The Lord in the temple bore the name of Kanvashankará. As at Thiruvávaduthurai, there were many *Odhuvárs*, officials and attendants at this Mutt too, and they all appeared accomplished and efficient. Many of the Brahmins in the Big Agraháram of Kallidaikurichi were very wealthy. They all held Subramania Desikar in high esteem. On learning about Desikar's arrival, they called on him with offerings of fruits.

I watched all these scenes, lost in amazement. The beauty of the scenery, loyalty of people and the eminence of the scholars there charmed everyone. Desikar often used to refer to Kallidaikurichi in laudatory terms. As a Junior Mutt Head, he had spent a number of years there. It became clear to me that his praise rose from his loyalty, while the place itself was richly deserving of the praise.

Venuvana Linga Thambirán who accompanied us had selected an auspicious day for the ceremonial entry of Subramania Desikar into Sevanthipuram Mutt. He nursed a doubt that Desikar might extend his stay in Kallidaikurichi out of his old loyalty, and kept urging him to leave for Sevanthipuram. I realized that he could stay in comfort at Kallidaikurichi for any length but, with my desire to see

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new places, I was hoping that Desikar should leave Kallidaikurichi soon.

Sevanthipuram:

On the chosen auspicious day, Desikar reached Sevanthipuram Mutt. Sevanthiappa Naicker , who was an important loyal official of Náyakka dynasty which ruled Pándyá land, had donated eight villages to the Mutt; Sevanthipuram was the most important of them. There was also a temple by name Sevantheeswaram established by him.

Venuvana Linga Thambirán has constructed a Mutt there, named it 'Subramania Desikar Vilásam', installed a statue of Subramania Desikar and arranged for regular poojás. His joy knew no bounds that Desikar himself was blessing the Mutt with his presence. That day was celebrated as a major festive occasion.

Many scholars had composed verses extolling the beautiful Mutt. At the conclusion of the ceremonial procession at two in the morning, I had the opportunity to recite all these verses in the assembly of scholars and dignitaries, and in the august presence of Desikar himself. Some of these scholars also highlighted the poetic finesse of their compositions. It was day-break when we completed the readings. There were in all eighty six verses composed by Mahá Vaidhyanátha Iyer, his elder brother and others. I had composed eight verses.

Editing the Book:

Venuvana Linga Thambirán desired that his verses should be brought out in printed form. When arrangements were in progress in this regard, many persons suggested that the verses in praise of Venuvana Linga Vilásam in Thiruvávaduthurai be also included in the publication. Ac-

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cordingly these two sets of verses and a few other verses were collected and printed in a book form at Thirunelveli Muthamizhágaram Press, and published. I was the one who had prepared and edited this book. While in later years I have edited and helped publish innumerable Tamil texts, that book was my maiden attempt. Because it was debut effort, I always had a soft corner for it. The title page of the book ran as follows:

"By the grace of Lord Ganapathi, the 'Glory of Subramania Desikar Vilásam', composed at the instance of Venuvana Linga Swámigal, the Superintendent at Sevanthipuram, of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam of the Kovil Kailása lineage.

The glory of Venuvana Linga Vilásam, erected by the above said Swámigal at Thiruvávaduthurai. These verses have been composed by many scholars, edited by Árumuga Swámigal, a disciple of the abovesaid Mutt, and by Sáminátha Iyer, son of Thiruvávaduthurai Venkatasubbu Iyer and printed at Thirunelveli Muthamizhágara Press. Vegudhánya Year, Áni Month."

The book also contained a brief biography of Venuvana Linga Thambirán, the hymns and prayers composed by Thiruvávaduthurai Kumárasámi Thambirán, and Vedanáyagam Pillai's eulogies on Subramania Desikar. It was necessary to add a page errata. In all, it came to 32 pages. When the book came fresh from the press, we were all lost in admiration looking at it and savouring the sight. While Árumuga Thambirán's name was also included, as a mark of courtesy, I had looked into all aspects of the publication as he had totally entrusted the work to me. So, whenever I looked at the book, I was filled with joy. 'The book that I had edited, a book containing my compositions' - apart

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from this mild pride, there was another significance to this book. It contained thirteen verses composed by Thyágarása Chettiár extolling the glory of Subramania Desika Vilásam. In one of those verses he had a word of praise for me too:

'Thunnurope rilakkanamu milakkiyamu
Meenákshi Sundaraper
Mánurá valarperumá nidaiyunarndh ellánalamum
Váindhan noenpor
Pannukar, solsámi nádhamaraiyon iyarasan bagak
Kutrála
Mennumuyar peyarpunaindha Kavirája
Mudarpalaru miyambi yetha'.

(Saamináthá, the Brahmin,
Blessed with life's assets,
Who has learnt
Great grammars literature
Under the poet peerless
- Meenákshisundaram,
Can compose poems myriad
Like his mentor noble.....
Receiver of kudos
From 'King of Poetry'
Shanmuga Kutrálam
And adorers many.)

Pápanásam:

Subramania Desikar stayed in Sevanthipuram for four months. Every morning he bathed in the Thámirabarani River near Pápanásam and worshipped Devi Ulagammai and Lord Kalyanasundareswarar. We also accompanied him. The site located at the foot of Podhiya mountain was an enrapturing sight. The beauty of the waterfalls frolicking among the rocks, the splendour of the sumptuous fishes

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prancing and glistening in myriad hues, the gentle caressing breeze – all these overwhelmed us in sheer joy. Fishing was prohibited there. So, the fishes there used to play with the bathers with no trace of fear or reserve.

A prasádam called 'oil rice' was served in this temple along with a companion '*Thuvaiyal*'. Desikar had arranged for this prasádam to be served to us to satisfy our mild morning hunger. Podhiya mountain; the Thámirabarani River floating down its slopes; the fishes slithering and dancing around, playing with and nibbling our feet; we, spraying morsals of prasádam as their fare; and our savouring the residual share – what a peerless joy it was!

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75. TWO SCHOLARS

One day two persons arrived at Sevanthipuram to call on Subramania Desikar from Puliyankudi, a seat of many scholars. With them arrived a wooden cart with a pile of palmleaf scrolls. They unloaded the scrolls in a heap on the thinnai. At that point, Desikar was taking lessons for us, seated on the thinnai. On seeing them and the pile of palm-leaf scrolls, I thought that they must be good scholars and that I could learn a lot from them.

New 'Padhikams' of Theváram:

They prostrated themselves at Desikar's feet offering their gifts. One of them was evidently a very wealthy person and the other called himself Deiva Pulavar(Divine Poet). I had learnt that the term Deiva Pulavar had always been applied only to the great Thiruvalluvar. I had not heard of anyone else being called by that name. I later learnt that the gentleman had shortened his name Deivanáyaka Pulavar into Deiva Pulavar.

The palm-leaf scrolls brought in the wooden cart were placed in front of Desikar. "What are these?" He asked.

"These are all decads of Theváram."

"Really? These scrolls appear new and freshly copied. Has not Theváram already appeared in print? Why the trouble of making new palm-leaf copies?'

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"These decads are different" said Deiva Pulavar. The wealthy gentleman who had so far been sitting silently now straightened up.

"Where have you managed to obtain new decads?" Desikar asked eagerly.

We recollected the history of the Theváram - how emperor Abaya Kulasekará had discovered Theváram with the help of Nambiyándán Nambi. We had learnt from the history that many Thevárám decads had been destroyed by termites. We started wondering if copies of some of these decads had been secured elsewhere.

But our excitement was shattered the very next minute.

The scholar pointed to the wealthy gentleman and declared proudly, "All these are Thevára Padhikams composed by our Pillaivál." That Pillaivál remained tightlipped. But the expression on his face was brimming with self-satisfaction.

Desikar was shocked by the scholar's words. He laughed a bit, but it was laced with anger. But he did not make it explicit.

Those two gentlemen could have thought that Desikar was duly impressed and that he would be eager to hear these great compositions! There was no trace of such excitement in Desikar. Very calmly he directed them to recite a few verses.

Even at that point the wealthy gentleman, the author of these decads, did not open his mouth. The scholar himself started reciting the verses. While reciting each verse, he would refer to an original Thevára verse and point to it as the model for the present composition. It was a mindless imitation of the structure and the words of the original, and

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was thoroughly tasteless.

In between, we raised some objections, directing them to the wealthy gentleman. He wouldn't reply us but would look at the scholar and grunt. And the scholar would offer some inane reply.

Desikar was not interested in listening any further; disgust was evident on his face. "It can be wearisome. We have had enough of a sample. That would do. You may stop the recitation." It was obvious to us that if more time had been granted, the scholar would have unloaded all the verses on our reluctant ears.

Desikar presented the wealthy gentleman with a zari shawl and sent him away the next day. After he left, Desikar turned to us and asked "Do you know why this gift was given?"

While we had an inkling of Desikar's sentiment in this matter, I told him rather cheekily, "For the Thevára Padhikams composed by him."

"Shiva Shivá! He appears to a be a dignitary; further, he had offered me a humble gift with courtesy. I simply reciprocated his sentiment. By the way, how were the Thevára Padhigams?"

"It would appear that those verses were not composed by the wealthy gentleman."

"The scholar has composed those verses and makes the dignitary dance to his tunes. He has also mindlessly accepted all these. There are such people too in this world. Why didn't they give a different caption to these compositions? They have the gall to call them Thevára Padhikams. They do not even realize that it is a form of sacrilege. Maybe, he would now have the audacity to compose another *Thiru-*

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vásagam and another *Thirukkovaiyár*!"

"Well, he might even compose another *Thirumuga Pásuram* composed by Lord Shivá himself and appearing in the Eleventh *Thirumurai*," I said. Desikar smiled. We joined him too.

Kutrálam Scenes:

Desikar planned to have darshan at the Ádi Thavasu Festival in Shankara Nainár Kovil and the Ávani Festival at Thiruchendur, and then proceed to Thirupperunthurai. He commenced the journey. He was honoured en route, and later reached Kutrálam and stayed in his Mutt there for a few days.

As it was my first visit to Kutrálam, I drank in the beauty there. The purity and allure of the waterfalls spread bhakti and joy to the visitors. The tall and lush trees towering towards the skies over centuries, and the pleasant drizzle lending them beauty and sustenance, were the special features of the place.

Kutrálam is unique in bestowing glory to Thirunelveli District. The salubrious breeze and the lovely waterfalls purified both body and mind. Even a stay there for many years would not pall.

Mr.Pennington:

Many Whites were staying there with their families to enjoy a bath in the waterfalls. Pennington, the District Collector of Thirunelveli, had also come there. Subramania Desikar and he had already known each other. So, on learning about Desikar's visit, the District Collector called on him one day. A Munsiff accompanied him.

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As directed by Desikar, some of us composed a few verses in praise of the Collector. The Munsiff explained the meaning to the Collector. The last part of my verse ran as follows:

"..... Mr.Pennington, Sir!
Pleasure it is to see you
in Kutrálam
A pleasure beyond words."

Sakkarai Bhárathiár:

One morning Shenbaga Kutrála Kaviráyar, myself and a few others set out to witness the scenic beauty of Kutrálam Hill. While going through a grove north of the hill, a melodious sound wafted in our direction. Trailing that sound, we reached a mansion; a person was singing aloud all by himself. As he was singing only to himself, there appeared to be no need for him to sing so loudly.

As we approached him, he stopped singing and asked us who we were. We informed him that Subramania Desikar was on a visit to Kutrálam and that we were accompanying him. We came to know that he was the younger brother of Vembathur Pichu Iyer, and that Sakkarai Bhárathi was his name.

As we were chatting, a question in an authoritative tone reached us from his side. "Come on! Why has the music stopped?" At that point a servant rushed from inside and looked at him politely. He started trembling and resumed singing.

We could not figure out what was happening. "Please do come to the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt here. We can converse leisurely there. Sannidánam would also be happy to

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see you." On hearing this, he merely nodded his approval as he appeared to be afraid to stop singing. We took leave.

Sakkarai Bhárathiár came to the Mutt that evening and called on Desikar. We learnt about his predicament and took pity on him. He had stayed with the zamindár for a few months. The zamindár was playing cards in his mansion with a person close to him. Bhárathiár was singing loud enough to reach zamindár's ears. As the zamindár was playing cards with a woman, Bhárathiár was forbidden from entering the mansion. The loud voice we had heard was that of the zamindár admonishing Bhárathiár for having stopped singing.

We were sad to hear these stories. "I have to suffer all these for a mere mess of pottage, " he said. Then, he enjoyed the conversation with Desikar. He sang a few rare lyrics and keerthanás. Scholarship and music found a happy union in him. As a connoisseur of both, Desikar savoured it. He presented the vidwán with a zari shawl worth fifteen rupees.

Bhárathiár had not expected such a handsome gift. "If only I have a patron like this who showers such gifts, I would happily slave for life." He said with gratefulness. Desikar replied, " We would always be pleased to receive you. Please do visit Thiruvávaduthurai also."

"I am condemned to move with mindless morons. If I do get the good fortune, I would sure come there." With tear-filled eyes he took leave.

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76. VISITING HOLY PLACES

After spending a few days in Thirukkutrálam, Subramania Desikar resumed his journey , inspecting the many villages belonging to the main Mutt. These villages under the supervision of Venuvana Linga Thambirán, provided the main support base of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. Kambaneri Pudhukkudi was one of those villages. On buying this village, Subramania Desikar renamed it as Ambalavána Desikapuram, in memory of his guru. We stayed there for a day.

Silver Caps did not Stay:

Sri Rámalinga Thambirán, the then Head of the Thiruppananthál Kási Mutt, had great affection for Subramania Desikar. Having learnt about Desikar's pilgrimage, he wanted to join him for a few days. He took a special train through Thirunelveli, came to Sevanthipuram, had Desikar darshan and stayed on with him. He greatly appreciated the Kambaneri Pudhukkudi village. It was an expansive one. With Desikar staying there with all his retinue, the village took on the appearance of a big town.

Desikar got from the Mahá Vaidyanáthayyer and his elder brother Rámasámy Iyer the necklaces of Rudhrákshá beads they were wearing and had them fitted with gold caps. The necklace I had been presented at Thiruvidaima-

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rudhur had only caps with gold coating. Desikar also had my necklace fitted with gold caps.

Shankara Nainár Koil:

As had already been planned, Desikar attended the *Ádi Thavasu* Festival at Shankara Nainár Koil. Shankara Nainár Koil temple had a reputation equalling that of Vaitheeswaran temple in Cholá land. I rejoiced having a darshan of Lord Shankaranáráyaná in whose name there was a happy blend of Shivá and Vishnu. I saw many devotees there who had come there and got cured of their ailments by the miraculous properties of the earth drawn from the anthill in the temple. I was thrilled with the darshan of Devi Gomathy consecrated at the temple. A festival is celebrated there each Áni month to commemorate the penance undertaken by the Devi for the sake of the Lord. That's why the festival is named Ádi Thavasu or 'The Penance of Ádi Month'.

After spending a week in Shankara Nainár Koil, we set out to Thiruchendur to have a darshan during the Ávani Festival. On the way, we spent a day at Karivalam Vandha Nallur. This name is familiar to the students who commence learning Tamil. Varadhunga Ráma Pándyá had composed three Prabandams -

Karivalam Vandha Nalloor:

Karuvai Padhitru Pathath Andháthi, Karuvai Kalitthurai Andháthi and Karuvai Venppá Andháthi; all these three Prabandams were in honour of this holy site. The term 'Karuvai' is just another name for Karivalam Vandha Nalloor.

As we approached the holy site, the Andháthi verses I had already heard came to my mind one by one. When I learnt them under Pillaivál, I had heard their meanings spelt out by him. Piecing together the many details my Master

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had shared with me on this site, I had drawn a mental picture of this temple. When I happened to see the temple in person, I could understand many things which were not very clear till then. The meanings I had heard as a part of the lessons had left some gaps in meaning. Only when I had the darshan of Lord Pálvanna Nádhar, my understanding became complete. I was overwhelmed by the sight of the old Kalák shrub which was providing shade to the Lord.

Varadhunda Ráma Pándyan, a great Tamil scholar, a king and a devotee - had lived in this town. So I set out with some friends to look around the town. I was happy to look at a place where the king had lived. As we were going round, we ran into a person in the middle of the street. A few Junior Thambiráns were accompanying him. He greeted me, but I could not place him.

He had a lovely turban around his head, earrings in his ears and rings on his fingers. Tied around his waist was a gold-threaded waist-cloth. Seeing all these, I thought I had not seen this dignitary earlier. Then I politely told him, " Sorry, I'm not able to place you." He replied, "This humble self is a disciple of the Mutt." Even then, I could not place him. I hesitantly asked him for his name. "I am Chokkalingam. Was I not a student under you in Thiruvávaduthurai?" Those around exclaimed, "Chokkalinga Thambirán!"

"Oh, Chokkalinga Thambirán! I was not able to recognize you", I expressed my surprise.

"I have changed my attire. I am now a simple Chokkalingam Pillai."

"Are you doing well? You had grown your hair two span long. Why this transformation?"

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"When I was in Thiruvávaduthurai I was in the company of monks. Was deeply interested in studies. You were also teaching. Sannidánam took care of me with great kindness. For some nameless reason I returned to this place. Old bonds started encircling me. Relatives urged me to start the life of a family man. I too began desiring it. After all, am I also not a human being? Simply by wearing ochre robes, can one become a saint? I got married. I'm running a school here. Getting good support from the people here. All due to the grace of Sannidhánam."

Then he took leave of us. I told Desikar about Chokkalingam Pillai. He replied with a benevolent smile, "This is indeed a proper course. It's much better than putting on the robes of an ascetic and doing things unbecoming of one."

Thiruchendur:

We left Karivalam Vandha Nalloor and reached Thiruchendoor via places like Alwárthirunagari. Many ceremonies were being performed in honour of the Lord of Thiruchendur on behalf of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam. Therefore, the Mutt has several establishments there. We had our darshan at the Ávani Festival. Desikar arranged for the feeding of Brahmins, and conducted a number of ceremonies in the worship of Maheswará.

The magnificent seashore temple of Thiruchendur was a great site. It was full of people who had come to offer worship. Thiruchendur is one of the holy sites which sustained the flame of devotion. That sacred site had witnessed the many miracles flowing from the divine grace of Lord Murugá.

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Kandar Kali Vennpá:

In the Thirupananthál Mutt, administered by Rámalinga Thambirán who was accompanying us, they worshipped Kumaragurupara Swámigal as their founder. That spiritual luminary was deaf and dumb since the age of five. Later he got those powers with the grace of Lord Senthil. Then he composed his first Prabandam *Kandhar Kali Vennpá* to propitiate Lord Senthil. Many chant this Prabandam with considerable respect and devotion, because they consider it as the grace of the Lord. I would often rejoice reading it. While at Thiruchendoor, I recited it a number of times. Ráma Linga Thambirán read and listened to this text with great enthusiasm as it had been composed by the spiritual ancestor of his monastery. At the end of the Kandar Kali Vennpá text Kumaraguruparar prayed fervently to be blessed with poetic inspiration. I kept reading that portion again and again and offered my obeisance to Lord Senthil. I was prompted by a yearning that I also be blessed with poetic gift.

My Decision:

While at Thiruchendoor Subramania Desikar called me and Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer and directed us to go back to our places for a few days and then return to Thirupperunthurai. He stated that he would by then have reached Thirupperunthurai. Rámalinga Thambirán also took leave and left for Thiruppananthál. With a resolve that I should learn to compose more poems with the blessings of Lord Senthil, I returned to Thiruvávaduthurai.

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77. OCCASIONAL POEMS

Kumárasámi Thambirán was the Junior Superintendent at Thiruvávaduthurai. He had introduced certain reforms in Thiruvávaduthurai when Subramania Desiar was on his pilgrimage. He spruced up the temple and the garden.

On return from Thirunelveli, I spent a few weeks at Thiruvávaduthurai. During that time, I spent many joyous hours with Kumárasámi Thambirán discussing matters relating to Tamil. I narrated to him about the scholars I had met during the journey as also the many incidents which had happened during the tour.

In line with the resolve I made to myself at Thiruchendur, I composed one verse daily on Sri Gomatheeswarar. Kumárasámi Thambirán as also the other Thambiráns, were delighted to hear those verses. Thyágaráya Chettiár used to come from Kumbakonam on Saturdays and Sundays. Those two days were full of lively discussions on Tamil.

A Poem with a Question:

Kumárasámi Thambirán was making arrangements to construct a building on the South Street. The workers were very busy in laying the foundation. I accompanied Thambirán when he went for site inspection. An old man was standing there, supervising the work. He was bare skin and bones and was too frail even to stand. One would doubt if

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he was even alive. I was wondering as to how he could effectively extract work from those workers. Suddenly there was a threatening roar. I was startled to find that roar emanating from that frail frame. I looked at him in wonder and disbelief. One more roar, louder and more threatening. I looked at Thambirán and remarked in surprise, "How such a booming voice has come from this feeble body?" As my mind was then steeped in composing verses, I structured the question in the form of a verse and asked him. He answered with a smile, quoting a famous line, "Mock not, based on mere appearance." He then added, "Why don't you compose a quatrain using your question as a concluding line?". When I did it, he was really pleased.

If You Stop They Move:

It was then about eleven o' clock. We set out to have a bath in Káveri. "We could as well have had our bath at the tank. Going to Káveri would take time. I come away and the work stops", he said.

I said, "It appears that if you move they stop, and if you stand they move", and I recited a stanza:

'Kandrálmun vilaverindha
Kannanmiga vanchavarum kaduva yindru
Mandráda luvandhathiruk gomuthi
Vánarpani vazhuvá dhátrum
Kundrádha pughazhkumara sámimuni
Varanmádam kuyitra vannán
Nindralav velainadan thidumanaiyá
Nadappinadhu nirkkum thánae.

(*Monk Kumárasámi*
Of fame sustained
Serving Lord Thirukkomuthi
Who danced in joy

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After lapping up venom,
Which even Kannan dreaded
The Kannan who a while back
Threw the calf before the Vilva tree -
If he stands
They move and work.
If he moves they stop and laze).

"It appears as if that you are in the grip of poetic inspiration today," exclaimed Thambirán and enjoyed listening to the verse over and over again.

Song of the Springs:

Then we reached the bathing ghats of the Káveri. On the southern bank was a huge Marudha tree, standing tall, leaning slightly towards the river and providing shade. We sat on the sands in the tree-shade. The shade was very pleasant in the midday sun.

There was no flowing water in the Káveri. Several springs had been dug on the river-bed for taking bath. There was the special arrangement for the Mutt Head to immerse himself in water and have a nice bath. A stream had been dug up with a barricade on either side. To the west of the stream, a large spring had been dug up for the Thambiráns to have their bath; this had also been fenced off. On the east was another large spring for the Mutt attendants and other Saivite devotees for their bath. An attendant had been appointed to take care of and guard these water resources.

Ponnu Pillai was with me. It was his duty to draw the used water out of those tiny ponds, sweep them of rubbish and keep them clean, and also to ensure that only the right people use the specifically earmarked pools and keep the others away. He also had a few other persons to assist him.

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Seeing us resting in the shade of the Marudha tree, he paid respect to Kumárasámi Thambirán and waited for his directions. "Is everything all right?" Thambirán asked. "Everything is fine. There is plenty of water in the pool. You can take your bath, Sir". The watchman was very strict. If any unauthorized person approached the pools he would give them a whack on the leg. If they approached the pool with utensils to take water he would snatch the utensils and throw them away. Mud pots would get smashed. Women were particularly scared of him. His face always had a fierce aspect; his words were harsh. He was firmly of the view that he could accomplish his task appropriately only with such a ruthless approach. In the lovely setting of tree shade and pleasant springs, his severe face gave company to the merciless sun.

Thambirán asked me, "Do you know this guy?"

"Very well, " I replied.

He returned to attend to his work.

"He is permanently grumpy. I've not seen any trace of joy in his face. Can you make him smile?" Thambirán asked me.

"Let me try," I replied and thought of composing a verse about him. Possibly because of his abrasive countenance, an element of harshness crept into my verse. I completed it and read it out to Thambirán.

"*Maruda marathu nizhalodu vellai manalirruppum*
Porudha marapponnup pillaiveng kával purindhugna
trum
Virudhama rarpudha vootrádalum nidham mevappet
rál
Karudha marakkanaramádha rodiruk kaiyini yae."

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(Ponni Pillai stands guard
With his voice booming....
Cozily seated on soft sand
In Maruda tree shade,
Daily bath delightful
In wondrous springs....
Sure, can't be swayed
By damsels celestial
With eyes bewitching
Sharp as shafts.)

"Something of the hero's character has invaded your poem," Thambirán said with a smile. Then he called Ponnu Pillai and told him, "He has composed a poem praising you and your work. Why don't you listen to it?" I read out the verse.

Railway Song:

Kumárasámi Thambirán had planted many kinds of flowering shrubs in the garden on the four sides of Southern Tank. He took great care in tending those plants. He would send fragrant herbs, leaves and flowers to the temple, and also send some to my father for his daily poojá.

Thambirán had a desire to take these to Chidambaram to adorn Lord Natarájá there with this floral offering. One day he took a large basket, filled it with fragrant herbs and leaves, and set out to Chidambaram, duly taking with him a few other Thambiráns and myself. We left by train at 12 noon. As the train journey was a new phenomenon, we were all excited. Not much of crowd. Not more than two or three in the train. For a while we occupied different carriages and enjoyed ourselves. Then we all congregated in one carriage and were engaged in lively conversation. As we had studied together as students, we had a lot of tidbits to share. We

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decided that each of us should compose a verse on the train journey, and set about doing it. Verses on a single theme, set in different angles, made interesting reading. I had composed two three verses. Now, I am able to remember the first two lines of a Vennpá.

'Unnalám thoosum udukkalám nithiraiyum
Pannalám noolgal padikkalám'

(Here we may eat or
Dress as you please
Here you may sleep
And read at your ease.)

A Fantasy:

We reached Chidambaram in the afternoon and had a darshan of Lord Natarájá in the evening. Kumárasámi Thambirán handed over the fragrant herbs and leaves to a Dikshidar for use in decorating the icon. He decked the entire icon with those herbs and leaves and performed a *Deepárádhaná*. Kumárasámi Thambirán rejoiced at the sight, exclaiming, "The Lord's frame is decked all green as if Devi Umá had overtaken him". I composed a poem on the theme and recited it. One of the herbal leaves used for the decoration was 'maru'. Maru also means fragrance. I fancied a verse weaving these two meanings together. My verse expressed the following thought: "The Lord consecrated at the holy site of Chidambaram has the very cosmic space as his sacred body. The savants declared that cosmic space has sound but no 'maru' or fragrance. As if to put them to shame, Sri Kumárasámi Thambirán has bestowed 'maru' (the green herb) to Lord Shivá with cosmic space as his body." This is the verse:

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"Thiruvendrum nindrolirum Thuraisaiyir Subramania De var kanpir
Poruvendru mindriyoli rungkumára sámimuni punga van drán
Maruvendrum Velikkilai yenpárnána Thillai Veli Mandril maeni
Aruvendru muruvendrun
Solanadippárkkindru maru alithán manno.

(The monk Kumárasámi
Marked by dazzle great,
As if there can be
A peer in benevolence
To Subramania Devar
Of Thuraisai bountiful....
The Lord he adorned today,
The Lord with formless form
Of Cosmic Space
Dancing at Thillai
With 'Maru' fragrance,
Putting to shame
Those averring
Sky bereft of aroma.)

The Thambiráns and others who listened to the verse warmly applauded it as a great piece of imagination.

"There is another nuance embedded in your verse, which was perhaps not thought of by you," said Thambirán. I was eager to know what it was.

"I believe you meant to convey a thought that those who claim that the Cosmic Space has no fragrance of its

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own, have been put to shame. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"I think there is scope for another reading. It could also mean that the earth, which prides itself as an 'abode of aroma' denied to outer space, has been put to shame. Is it not? Is there not a Shasthraic concept that fragrance is an essential quality of earth?"

We were all delighted to hear this alternative explanation.

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78. FILLING THE GAPS

I stayed in Thiruvávaduthurai for two months. Subramania Desikar arrived at Thirupperunthurai, as had been earlier planned. After a few days I received a directive from Desikar that I should go over to Thirupperunthurai with my father and stay there for some time. Kannappa Thambirán, a superintendent at the Mutt, also received a communication that he should make all necessary arrangements for our journey. I started the journey to Thirupperunthurai along with my parents. While we were leaving, Kannappa Thambirán told my father, "It is a jungle road, but no need to worry. There are small monasteries en route, and they will take care of you".

We reached Thirupperunthurai. Special lodging arrangements had been made for us. Many dignitaries and scholars kept coming there to meet Desikar and have lively conversations with him. I had the pleasure of the company of several scholars such as Singavanam Subbu Bhárathiár, Vembathur Pichu Iyer, Manamerkudi Krishna Iyer and Melagaram Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar.

Pichu Iyer:

Pichu Iyer was a great extempore poet. He recited many new verses in praise of Subramania Desikar and also a few occasional verses. Merely as a pastime, I would interpose some objections to some aspects of his verses. He had used pun in some places and had, therefore, changed

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the shape of the words. He had ignored the usual rules of grammar and traditional usage. And had exploited the rules related to exceptions. When I raised my objections, Subramania Desikar gently smiled, indicating his endorsement of the objection. "These are verses composed in a hurry. Is it proper to pick grammatical holes in such compositions?" So saying he recited the following verse:

"Vinjuthalai yárseda vithaganen druluninmun
Anju thalaiyudaiya návanál vinjupugazh
Komutti vázhsub ramaniak kondalae
Mámuth iyai vazhangu vái."

(O Subramania the Great
Living in famed Komutti!
Aspire do people
To impress before you
Like mighty Ádisesha
The multi-hooded serpent
Alas!
In your presence awesome
Even five hoods
Would pale as lacking.
May the Great Salvation be yours.)

The pun involved in the verse was interesting. The Tamil word 'Anju' would mean either 'five' or 'fear' and the word 'vinju' means either 'to exceed' or ' to excel/surpass'. Consequently, the first two lines could also be read as follows:

'Even the Great Chief (Snake Ádhiseshá) would have to fear as one disgraced or lacking, in your presence'.

We were amazed that he could produce a stanza with so many clever puns, all in a jiffy.

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A Dignitary:

Most of the dignitaries calling on Desikar used to be endowed with Tamil learning. Some of them who knew of the constant drone of Tamil in Desikar's presence, would request the students to recite some verses and test them with questions, mainly to please Desikar. At one point, a very wealthy person from Kottoor, Rangasámi Mudaliár, called on Desikar with his family and relatives, while returning from a sacred bath in Rámeswaram. He was well-versed in Tamil. Another dignitary who accompanied him appeared to be a scholar in Tamil texts. He was particularly well-versed in Kamba Rámáyanam. While he was conversing with Desikar, Desikar called the students and introduced them to him. He asked us a few questions. His scholarship was evident form those questions. He directed most of his questions to me. I answered him satisfactorily.

Lessons in Puránam:

I developed an interest in studying *Kánchi Puránam*. As I could not access the book during Pillaivál's time, I could not study that text. I continued to have that grievance. The first canto of the text was composed by Sri Sivagnána Munivar. When I expressed my desire to Subramania Desikar, he arranged to get the eight volumes and told me that I can study these texts under Sri Namachiváya Desikar, the Junior Mutt Head. These lessons started.

Namachiváya Desikar studied under Pillaivál. He used to spend a lot of his time researching Tamil texts. He had learnt the sub-titles of Saiva Shástrás. Teaching students was a pleasurable pastime for him. I started studying Kánchi Puránam under him everyday. There was a significant difference in diction between Sivagnána Munivar and Kachiyappa Munivar. Philosophy and poesy blended seamlessly

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in Sivagnána Munivar's works. In the natural poetic flow, ideas fitted themselves beautifully. In the second canto, however, Kacchiappa Munivar tended to display his erudition. He used ideas and words from the Sangam texts. One can find rare verse sequences, while he cites grammatical examples. In Sivagnána Munivar's text, we lose ourselves in sheer pleasure. In Kacchiappa Munivar's work, we marvel at his amazing learning.

The Kumbábhishekam of Mánikkavásagar Temple:

Subramania Thambirán, who was in charge of the administration of Thirupperunthurai temple, had built a shrine on the western side of the first enclosure of the temple, and had installed an icon of Mánikkavásagar there, and performed kumbhábhishekam (the consecration ceremony). Rámasámi Iyer, the elder brother of Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer had already composed Periya Puránam in keerthaná form. It contained the history of the three major Saivite saints. As the history of Mánikkavásagar had not been rendered in the form of Tamil keerthanás, he composed appropriate Tamil keerthanás and had them formally launched there. At that point, we also composed many verses extolling the kumbhábhishekam and covering the history of Mánikkavásagar, and also recited them.

Thiruppananthál:

Then, Desikar decided to set out for Thiruvávaduthurai and made necessary arrangements. I had sent my parents to Thiruvávaduthurai earlier and was staying with Desikar. Rámalinga Thambirán had already requested Desikar to favour Thiruppanánthál with his visit, on his way back. Accordingly he left Thirupperunthurai with his retinue, received the homage of many disciples en route, and reached Thiruppananthál via Kumbakonam.

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Rámalinga Thambirán had arranged for elaborate decorations all along the route of many miles, planting banana trees and tying festoons. He had also set up a special bungalow within Thiruppananthál Mutt, constructed with bamboos. It had the appearance of a regular stone-masonry structure.

Subramania Desikar stayed in the bungalow. The elaborate courtesies extended by Rámalinga Thambirán left us speechless. Many Tamil and Sanskrit scholars came there and read out verses extolling Subramania Desikar. Many students and I also recited many verses praising Desikar and Rámalinga Thambirán. All these verses were put together and published as a printed book entitled 'An Anthology of Verses by Many Poets'.

Returning to Thiruvávaduthurai:

As the Thiruvávaduthurai temple festival and Guru Poojá were drawing close, Desikar could not stay long at Thiruppananthál. In a few days he returned to Thurai. Guru Poojá and related festivities were celebrated in a grand manner. Desikar was getting over the fatigue of the long pilgrimage and was also meeting the usual demands of his august position. We arranged for letters to be written to the dignitaries he had met during the pilgrimage. He also conducted classes for his disciples now and then.

Classes:

Whenever I had spare time, I studied Tamil texts under Namachiváya Desikar. I also took lessons for various students. Namachiváya Desikar was an indefatigable teacher. He would never get bored or tired. When he was teaching others, I would be sitting by his side and listening. As desired by him, I would also take lessons in his presence. He

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was ever a strict disciplinarian. If I happened to be absent while he was teaching, he would immediately send for me.

Sharp Chilli:

One day, after lunch, Namachiváya Desikar was teaching some students in the garden close to the southern steps of the temple tank. In a languorous mood after lunch, I slept in a secluded corner. Noticing my absence during the lesson, he sent a person to fetch me. No one had the courage to question his directives. The person reached the place where I was enjoying my siesta. He tried to wake me up from my deep sleep; I wouldn't get up. Then he shook me up and I woke up. My fatigue was still lingering. I felt more tired because I was woken up half way in sleep.

'Why are people so inconsiderate!' I felt somewhat irritated. But, could I have expressed that irritation?

I started walking, but my legs were tottering. Drowsiness weighed on my eyelids. On my way there was a chilli plant. I plucked a chilli, squeezed it and applied the juice on my eyes. My helplessness drove me to this crazy action.

My eyes started burning no end. It appeared to be a case of taking refuge in a snake out of fear for a scorpion. I could not take even a single step forward. I sat down.

Everyone felt sad at my desparate action. My friends realized the torment I was undergoing.

Studying Saiva Shástrás:

While encountering matters related to Saiva Shástrás during his lessons, Namachiváya Desikar tended to deal with them somewhat superficially. His position was that Saiva Siddhanthá texts required to be studied in depth separately. While I was studying under Pillaivál, I had learnt

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very well many of the Saiva Shástrá ideas occurring here and there. While teaching *Sivagnána Bodha Bashyá*, Subramania Desikar would direct me to read out the texts. Even so, I thought it would be beneficial to formally study Saiva Siddhántha Shástrás such as Sivagnána Bodha Sitrurai (Gloss).

Namachiváya Desikar had no spare time. Subramania Desikar managed to discern my idea. He called me one day and told me, "We would ourselves take lessons for you on texts such as Sittrurai. Can I find a more worthy receptacle to receive such learning?" He started teaching me Saiva Siddhánthá texts in a systematic manner. I could study *Sivagnána Bodha Sittrurai, Sivagnána Siddhiyár Pozhippurai* and several other secondary texts, and filled the gaps in my learning.

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79. COMPOSING VERSES

My days in Thiruvávaduthurai were pleasing and fulfilling. Teaching students, studying and moving with scholars filled my days. The opportunity to move with Subramania Desikar and learning from him capped it all.

Desikar used to write letters to his friends everyday. Not less than fifty letters a day. He would dictate letters to his scribes in a calm and deliberate manner; he would himself write some letters. The scribes had developed an ability to write down Desikar's thoughts in an effective manner. Sivasubramania Pillai was the chief scribe. Desikar would also devote his attention off and on, to hear grievances from people and to redress them.

Consequently the discipline of having timely food was adversely affected. This lack of attention to his health caused him cough and indigestion. His eyes started losing some of their lustre. Unmindful of all this, he continued to perform his duties as usual.

Whenever any scholar visited him, all his time was spent in discussing matters relating to study and scholarship. Desikar would expound matters gleaned from texts such as *Drávida Mahá Báshyam*. On those occasions, he would ask me to read out the related portions in the texts. He would point out the page number in the text and the

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related subject matter. The ease with which he did this amazed me. Thanks to his constant study of these texts, he had a clear memory of even the page references in respect of any particular subject matter. During this phase, I got to spend a lot of time with Desikar. This gave me considerable satisfaction.

Translation:

Sometimes Desikar would state some ideas and then direct me to compose verses duly incorporating those ideas. I would compose the verses immediately and read them out. Sometimes a Sanskrit scholar would recite an old sloká. If it had aesthetic finesse, Desikar would look at me. I would take the hint and convert it into a verse in Tamil. The Sanskrit scholar would enjoy it and also laud the greatness of the Mutt. On some days, when I returned home for the night, Desikar would tell me a few slokás or some new ideas. I would weave them into Tamil verses during the night and recite them to Desikar the next morning, much to his joy.

Bhoja Charitrá:

One day a Sanskrit scholar visited the Mutt. He recited a few slokás from Bhoja Charitra and explained the meaning. They were full of poetic merit. He recited one verse and explained its meaning: "Boja Maharájá ! What is the reason for everyone to extol you as an exemplar of benevolence? You would not lend your chest to other women and your back to your foes. "At once I composed a Kattalai Kalitthurai verse incorporating the idea. It ran like this:

Kodaiyir siranthanai yendrunai yávarun kooralennae
Nadayir sirandha poraná riyárodu nannalargal
Idayir sirandhanai munnodu pinnindru meendhilainee
Thodaiyir sirandha puyaBhoja rájá sugodhayanae!'
(O Bhoja Rájá, the beneficient!

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Everyone offers praise unto you
For reason sublime
As altruist peerless.
You bare not your chest
To women alien
Alluring though they be,
You show not your back
In retreat
To the enemy hordes -
Front and back alike.)

There was a pun in my verse. The words 'munnum' and 'pinnum' imply not only the 'chest' and 'back', but also 'before' and 'after'. The second meaning pointed to the past, present and future and denoted a continuity. Desikar noticed it and expressed his appreciation: "It's really good. The way you had combined 'present' with 'past' and 'future' is indeed delectable!"

On another occasion, another vidwán came and recited a few slokás. When Bhoja Maharájá was walking along the street one day, a Brahmin came from the other direction carrying water in a leather pouch. On seeing this, the king wondered why he was carrying water in a leather pouch which is considered ritually impure. He asked his minister to look into this matter. Inspired by Bhoja Rájá's glance, the Brahmin replied him in the form of a sloká.

"Bhoja Rájá! You've conquered your enemy force, put them behind bars and chained them with fetters, resulting in all the iron getting used up in this process. You have been giving grants to scholars and others who approach you; these acts of benevolence are inscribed in 'copper plates' and copper also has become scarce. In which other utensil can I carry water?"

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The Sanskrit scholar recited the verse and explained the meaning beautifully. Evidently savouring it, Subramania Desikar looked at me and asked, "How do you like this?" "Very fine" I replied, and sensing his mood composed a verse and recited it:

'Nerár Padhathup Punaivilangálayam Neenginanir
Será dhuvarkkarul Sásanathár Chembu theerndhalen drál
Erárnin náttidai Bhojavith tholandri yánidhamum
Neerá dharatho deduppamat rariyádhu nigazhthuvai yae'.

(Iron aplenty spent
To forge fetters for foes,
Copper in demand great
To inscribe grants
Announcing your deeds generous.
Pray tell me, Bhojá !
In your country glorious
How does one carry water,
Save in leather pouches?)

A Petition to the Wind:

On another day, a scholar came to Desikar seeking some help. He recited a number of old slokás. Those slokás contained veiled request to the patron seeking help and protection. In one of the slokás, a person struggling in a canoe, in the midst of a cyclone in the midsea, appeals to the wind to spare him. I translated the verse into Tamil, and my verse ran as follows:

Meegáman seyalmuraiyum pirazhndha dhuveezhn
Thanathuduppum meendrond rámal
Âgáya maraithapuyal ambudhiyo
Kadak karidhál andho márgam

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Aekádha vidhamalaikaludaiyadhu noo
Vidhaikkaraippál aegsacheidhu
Neekava ladhukavizhiv virandumundran
Kaiyanavám nigazhthung kalae.

(Control lost
By canoe's captain,
The oars slipped away,
Stars in the skyspace
Blanketed by hurricane,
Couldn't cross the sea,
Oh! Fierce the waves,
Can't wade the way.
Pray take canoe to the bank
Lend us protection
With your hand, O Wind!)

I had composed many such verses in translation, to suit different occasions. In the resultant enthusiasm, everyday I started composing verses on my own, spun out of my own imagination. On one occasion, I got ill and could not go to the Mutt for a few days. I was bedridden. I put my enforced rest to good use. In respect of each of the six main abodes of Lord Murugá, I composed one Irattai Manimálai.

Memory Skill:

Sometimes some vidwáns would visit the Mutt and display their memory skills or '*Avadhánams*'. Some of them would display different levels of Avadhánam skills - Ashtávadhánam, Shodasávadhánam, Thirty-two Avadhánam and Sadhávadhánam (involving memories of eight, sixteen, thirty-two and hundred different items). We, the students at the Mutt, used to marvel at this phenomenon. We also nursed a desire to develop this skill. We also practised it.

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Then, one day, I assembled my fellow students and my own students and tried my hand at this 'Avadhánam' skill. Some indicated a line and asked me to complete the verse. Some raised doubts on some texts. Some asked me to repeat an old verse. Some posed some problems in Arithmetic. I replied them appropriately. Strong memory skill is essential for an 'Avadhánam' exercise. Among those who put me to test was one Ramakrishna Pillai, a Vaishnavite student of mine. I remember even now that the distitch he had given me was '*Pundareeka vallithál pugazhndhu pádi uyvanae* (I"ll be saved singing the praise of Lakshmi seated on Lotus).

As the Mutt was brimming with Tamil aroma, I developed a flair to undertake boldly any effort related to Tamil. Other students also occasionally indulged in such efforts.

A Letter in Verse:

Once Máyuram Vedanáyakam Pillai had composed a few Venppás on Subramania Desikar, sent them to me with a covering verse addressed to me and requested me to reach the Venppás to Desikar. I read out the Venppás to Desikar and informed Vedanáyakam Pillai in the form of a verse:

"*Tháyaga menanan návalar palarkkum*
Dhanamudhal alithiyal Veda
Náyaga magipá neeyaga magizhndhu
Nankanup piyamudhar pávai
Áyaga madhilvázh Subramania
Áriyan páluda nuraithen
Noyaga levarkku ninperun seerai
Nuvandrana nuvalarum pugazhoi.

(Patron benign of poets,

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Protector generous,
Poet of repute,
Vedanáyagá our exemplar!
Thy poem of homage
You sent to Subramania
Our wise lord and mentor
Conveyed have we unto Him
With pleasure and pride.)

Having been so engaged in composing different forms of occasional verses, my skill in versification kept improving. Others derived pleasure from this and I got enthused. Desikar would often say, "You have very well learnt Pillaivál's style of composition. Your verses bring back to us that savant's memory." Those words filled me with joy, as I have always considered my knowledge of Tamil as Pillaivál's grace and benediction.

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80. A NEW LIFE

It was dawn on Thursday, February 12, 1880. I was full of spirits, as usual. I was confident, so were those around me, that my future was secure under the care of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam. I felt that some sort of tranquility has entered my life. While I did not have the ability to fill Pillaivál's shoes I expected that I could develop a generation of his students and adopt it as my life's mission.

But god's will was different. Not stopping with my association of the Mutt, good fortune had possibly been scripted for me that I should develop in the fields of teaching, research and service to Tamil. That destiny started unfolding. It brought Thyágarása Chettiár that afternoon from Kumbakonam and landed him in Thiruvávaduthurai. My new life began.

Chettiár's Arrival:

When Thyágarása Chettiár arrived at the Mutt, the Junior Mutt Head Sri Namachiváya Desikar was resting after his lunch. It was around 2 p.m. As desired by Desikar, I was taking lessons on *Kánchi Puránam* to some students. Chettiár came straight to where I was. Namachiváya Desikar also came there on knowing about Chettiár's arrival. After

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discussing various matters for an hour, Chettiár left saying, "I've come to call on *Mahá Sannidánam*. Please grant me leave." As suggested by him, I too accompanied him. We found Sri. Subramania Desikar explaining to someone parts of Kamba Rámáyanam. Chettiár and I observed it. After his doubts got clarified the visitor left. Chettiár and Subramania Desikar had a lively discussion on the greatness of Kamba Rámáyanam.

Chettiár's Submission:

After an hour's discussion, Chettiár said, " One submission."

Desikar: What's the matter? Please tell me.

Chettiár: I am planning to fix my job for Sáminátha Iyer. Sannidánam should be gracious enough to endorse this move.

Desikar: Sure, we'll see. After all, we need to think of it only at the time of your retirement.

Chettiár: I have indeed retired. I've also submitted the necessary doctor certificate. There is no one in my job now.

This unexpected news startled Desikar. I was stunned too.

Desikar: You have not informed us about this matter earlier. We were under the impression that you would serve for a few more years.

Chettiár:

"A week ago I had submitted a letter requesting to be relieved. I was also making arrangements to get Sáminátha Iyer appointed in my place. Sannidánam must bless him and grant him permission.

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Desikar thought for a couple of minutes and replied, "His being here is very useful to us. So I cannot relieve him."

With evident sadness, Chettiár said: "Sannidánam should not be taking such a decision. I had already given a word to the college principal Gopál Rao. A few others have been desperately trying for this job. I have put forth Sáminátha Iyer's case strongly and have also obtained Ráyar's promise. I know His Holiness's affection for him and am convinced that this is a very good job; that's why I had taken these steps. This would be good for all and also yield fame."

Desikar did not relent. Chettiár continued to plead my case, citing several other reasons. It was already past seven. Desikar left for his regular rites saying, "We will leave it for the time being. Please complete your prayers and join us for our evening worship of Namachiváya Moorthy."

Chettiár Upset:

Chettiár and I got up and went outside. We encountered Kumárasámi Thambirán there. Chettiár informed him why he had come. But Thambirán replied, "What you say is just not possible. He is so very useful to the Mutt and how could you expect Sannidánam to part with him? I too don't find the idea acceptable. I'm sure others also would feel likewise."

"How do I deal with this predicament?" - Chettiár left mumbling to himself. Then he looked at me and said, "Don't be bothered by all these words. Simply say, 'I'm leaving' and come with me. Even if you toil for this Mutt all your life, you can't dream of any progress beyond your present level. After all, you are getting fifty rupees a year

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here; you can get it in one month. Here, from morning till ten in the night you should keep taking lessons. And also attend to other chores. There, not more than four hours of work a day. On the top of it, two days off each week."

He continued to dwell upon the differences between the two places in a number of ways. Listening to his words with a certain indifference, I replied, " I've noticed your highlighting the plus points in Kumbakonam. Till now I never thought that there can be a place greater than this Sannidánam. There is nothing lacking here. You shouldn't belittle the salary I get here. Sannidánam takes care of all our requirements." Chettiár had not fully understood the depth of my gratitude to the Mutt.

My Situation:

I was in a dilemma. I found the college job attractive. But the affection of the people in Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt was an integral part of my very life. In Desikar's refusal to relieve me, I could find the depth of his affection for me. 'Is money the be-all and end-all of one's life? Can the reputation of the college match the glory of the Mutt? And, what a glory! What an eminence! Is it at all easy to be associated with such a great institution?' All these thoughts filled my mind. In between, I was also enticed by the words of Thyágarása Chettiár.

Rolling all these matters in my mind, I firmly conveyed my decision to Chettiár: "I would come to Kumbakonam only if Sannidánam grants me permission. Otherwise, I won't."

"You may not realize the strength of my argument now. Will realize it later. I will again try to win over His Holiness to my side." So saying, he left for his quarters. I left

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for my home, a confused man. I informed my parents about the developments. My father said, "We command so many comforts here. The people here are all so kind. Where can we find a place like this?" My mother was also not inclined to leave Thiruvávaduthurai.

The Morning's Events:

I woke up the next morning. It was a Friday. My mind was in a whirl. Chettiár took me along and went to Desikar. On the way he told me, "You simply keep quiet. Don't express any opinion of yours. I will somehow manage to get Sannidánam's approval." Chettiár paid his obeisance to Desikar and sat by his side. I sat down too. I expected Chettiár to raise my subject. He started on a different note. "When Pillaivál was in Thiruchiráppalli, he had composed 'Thyágarája Leelai'. It had, however, not been completed. When he was composing it, I was the one who inscribed it in palm leaves. That manuscript is still here. I thought I would complete the text. Please issue instructions to hand over the manuscript to me." Desikar sent me to fetch the manuscript. I went to the library, searched for some twenty minutes and brought the manuscript. When I had gone to the library, Desikar and Chettiár were fully involved in discussing my matter – so I learnt. Chettiár received the palm-leaf manuscript of *Thyágarása Leelai* from Desikar. Then he strongly pleaded with His Holiness: "You must give a favourable decision on my request and send me away happy".

Desikar: As of now, it is important that he is here. We'll deal with it when a suitable occasion arises.

Chettiár: We can't easily get such an opportunity again. It is an important position. Though the salary is nothing great, there is a lot of prestige in it. All the students there would end up as important officials in future. Is it not an

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honour to the Mutt that a person associated with it is teaching there? Till now I used to frequently mention about the greatness of the Mutt. If some other stranger replaces me in my position, the link with the Mutt would get snapped. If he is there, the link will be sustained and strengthened. I'm sure that Sannidánam is aware of the many resultant benefits. My idea is that my successor should be one associated with this place and who had been tutored by Your Highness. Even after he moves to Kumbakonam, he can come here during the holidays. Only after weighing all these considerations, I am making this submission. I again appeal to Your Highness to grant me this boon.

Saying this, Chettiár stood up and paid his respect with folded hands. When he was marshalling his arguments one by one, Desikar was listening very attentively. Apart from his words, Chettiár's body language also underlined the intensity of his desire. It appeared as if Desikar realized that the suggested move would strengthen his position and enhance the Mutt's reputation. There was a thaw in his mood. He remained silent for a while. Then he asked, "Well, what can we do now?"

Divine Providence:

Chettiár could discern a favourable reply in that question. He immediately requested Desikar, "Sannidánam should write with His holy Hand a letter to Gopála Rao recommending Sáminátha Iyer's appointment to the post and also a certificate of appreciation for Sáminátha Iyer's work." Desikar summoned Ponnusámi Chettiár, the Chief Scribe of the Mutt, and had both the Papers written. The certificate ran as follows:

"Sáminátha Iyer mentioned in this Note, had studied for six years with distinction Tamil Grammar and Literature

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under our Court Poet Meenákshisundaram Pillai, and has also been studying for four years under us. He has good capacity to teach lucidly both Grammar and Literature. He bears an excellenct character.

18th February, 1880.

(Pramádhu Year, Kumbaravi Third Day)

Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam

Subramania Pandára Sannadhi.

He signed a letter to Gopála Rao, and while affixing his signature on the testimonial, there was a peel of bells from the Sabhápathi poojá. On hearing this sound, Chettiár stood up and clapped in glee, shouting, " He has got the job!" Desikar who had been assailed by concern about relieving me, now felt a sense of assurance. "Though we are reluctant to relieve him, it is god's order. Can we stop divine dispensation? Well, we are sending him at an auspicious moment. No need to worry." Chettiár was greatly elated.

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81. THE HEART LINGERS...

Soon enough the news spread that Subramania Desikar had agreed to my taking up the job in Kumbakonam College. On hearing this, those associated with the Mutt were sad. Thyágarása Chettiár did not even stay for lunch. "I have to conduct a death anniversary ceremony, " he told Subramania Desikar and left for Kumbakonam in evident haste.

When I went home and informed my parents of these developments, their reaction was ambivalent - neither happy nor sad. I was in a daze. There was a clash between the bond with a known place and the prestige attached to a new one.

Desikar's Thinking:

It was customary for Subramania Desikar to move to the State Room and distribute holy ash to the disciples, after the Deepárádhaná ritual at the main worship. Many Thambiráns and disciples would follow him to the State Room. At that point, the Junior Mutt Head would hold Subramania Desikar's hand and bring him. Desikar was returning to the State Room that night at the conclusion of the worship. His mind also must have been preoccupied with my move to Kumbakonam. He told the Junior Mutt Head, "Chinna Pandáram! We've recommended Sáminátha Iyer to take up Thyágarása Chettiár's job. Chettiár had come yesterday

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only to take him. We have agreed to this and also written a letter of recommendation and testimonial."

A surprised Namachiva Desikar replied, "How could we do this? He is fully in the know of the customs and practices of this place; moves with the visiting scholars and dignitaries in a pleasant manner; teaches students very well. He has been of such great use to this place. Though I am a humble servant, I must submit that I do not find this idea agreeable."

All the persons in the Mutt were of a similar opinion. They all wondered how Subramania Desikar had agreed to this. They were all of the view that Desikar would never get me out of the Mutt even if there was a lot of pressure.

The Mutt Head explained his position to Namachiváya Desikar. "What you say is right. All of us know that he is of considerable use to the Mutt. Even so, we agreed to do this only in his long-term interest. Till we are here at the helm, he would be considered a know-all. Time doesn't stand still. After our time, one cannot be sure that he would receive similar help and attention. Someone would well pop up one day and say, 'I can as well teach what he does. It is not necessary to pay him salary.' What would be his situation then? In places like this, one can continue in security only with the support of many people. It is not easy for a person to win the affection of everyone from the Mutt Head to the man in charge of Stores. It is our view that those whom we patronize should ever be in comfort. We thought a government job would ensure that there would be no bar to his progress. That's why we agreed to send him. We would like to see him in stable comfort with our own eyes."

On learning Desikar's thoughts, everyone marvelled at his far-sightedness. Madurai Rámasámi Pillai who was

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present during this conversation narrated to me later.

In the afternoon, Desikar sent for my father and uncle and informed them of his decision. They were somewhat disturbed. Desikar comforted them with appropriate counsel.

Auspicious Time:

At 3 p.m., Desikar sent for an astrologer to fix an auspicious time for the move. He advised that eight o' clock that very night was an auspicious time. Desikar immediately sent for me and told me that he planned to send me that night and asked me to get ready. I felt greatly sad. I had not thought that I would have to move that soon. I felt that the entire matter was being driven by an unseen hand.

"Should I leave tonight itself?" I asked him, with my voice choking.

"Yes. I had consulted the astrologer and he has advised that it is good for you to leave soon after eight this night. It is but proper that good things are accomplished without delay."

I was left speechless. I went home and started making preparations for the journey. I picked up at random clothes and books I could lay my hands on.

Taking Leave of Desikar:

Desikar sent word that I should see him at the Mutt in the evening after the darshan at the temple. I did so accordingly. "You should leave at the right time." he said and gave me an embroidered coat, a muslin turban, a waist coat, a large zari-bordered upper cloth and an expensive shawl. With words brimming with affection he told me, "Please make appropriate use of all these". Then he had several oth-

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er things brought to us: a large rosewood trunk, a portable writing desk and a silk umbrella with an ivory handle worth some forty rupees, brought sometime earlier by a disciple from Colombo. He placed a two-anna coin in each of the boxes and gave them to me. He then called Shanmugam Pillai, one of his personal assistants and told him, "You better go to Kumbakonam tomorrow, buy a pair of slippers for him, have a cover stitched for the umbrella and arrange for all his needs".

Then he looked at me and told me, "Sáminátha Iyer! When we had gone to Madurai for Kumbábhishekam, in the large assembly you had recited a verse of Vedanáyakam Pillai, in the presence of Mani Iyer. Then you had mentioned, 'I don't have a proud gait or a flashy umbrella'. Do you remember that? Those two omissions now stand rectified." I was moved to tears that Desikar had remembered what I had said long ago and at his gracious gesture. 'I will never ever adopt a gait of arrogance and self-importance'.

"You should occupy Thyágarása Chettiár's position and gain good fame. Later you should also go to Chennai and collect more renown in the positions honoured by Thándavráya Mudaliár, Mahálinga Iyer and Visága Perumál Iyer." He also passed on to me betel leaves and areca nuts as an auspicious sign.

His words sounded like those of a mother blessing with a brimming heart that her son should occupy high and respected positions. I had not fully realized the depth of that affection when I was immersed and luxuriating in it. Only when the reality of separation dawned on me, its value increased manifold.

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The State of My Mind:

The auspicious time arrived. I took leave. My legs moved ever so haltingly. While my body moved, my mind lingered there. On my way I instinctively stopped at the door of the storehouse. I could not bear to part from it, a place which gave me whatever I wanted and whenever I wanted. Where am I going to find a place like this! I moved ahead, looked at the lamp posts dotting the place. How many days have I read so many texts, sitting under this lamp-post! They had helped me study books with great concentration and with no worry; the thought of separating from them filled me with grief. I went to the audience hall. There, I looked at the many places where I had read texts with my colleagues. I stood transfixed. I had slept there blissfully on several nights, with palmleaf account books as my pillows. I looked at those bundles. Every little piece there seemed to assume life and speak to me. I took leave of them. 'Aren't they mere objects? Isn't it crazy to get so bonded to them?' Many may think so. For me, my entire world resided in Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. When I parted from the several things there, I was overwhelmed by a feeling that I was leaving this world.

Departure:

I took leave of all the friends on the way and reached home. I finished my food and reached Narasingam Pettai rail station in the cart provided by the Mutt. My father had sent with me Ganapathi Iyer, my uncle's son, to be of possible help. Thambiráns, friends and students had come to bid me farewell. They were all genuinely sad. I took leave of all of them, with tear-filled eyes.

The train arrived. I boarded the train and left for Kumbakonam. ◈

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82. I PASSED THE TEST

I alighted at Kumbakonam rail station at ten in the night and went straight to Thyágarása Chettiár's house. He had just then completed his discussions with his students and was about to have his night meal. He did not expect me this early. He exclaimed in some surprise, "How come Sannidánam had the heart to give you leave so soon?"

"Well, today is an auspicious day; so he sent me. You left in a hurry to perform a memorial ceremony. Was it done in time?"

Chettiár's Trick:

With a gentle smile, he told me, "No ceremony. No nothing. I know the depth of affection that Sannidánam has for you. If I had tarried there any longer, I was afraid that something new could occur to him, and he could well say that he wouldn't send you to Kumbakonam. With this fear lurking in me, I bolted as soon as he said 'Yes'. To justify my sudden departure, I referred to the ceremony; it was a pure concoction. It is, of course, not a sin to tell a lie for a good cause. I have even Thiruvalluvar's endorsement for it:

'Poimmaiyum Váimai yidatha puraitheerntha
Nanmai payakku menin.'

(Falsehood may become Truth if it can produce blame less good)."

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Then, he had a quick meal and returned. Later we sat together and chatted for a long time. I showed him the shawl and the other gifts given by Subramania Desikar. He was very happy. He explained to me in some detail how he had landed the college job and how he had got the job for me. He also shared with me useful information about the prestige of the college, the nature of teachers there and the method to be adopted in teaching students. I stayed that night in his house.

Bundles of Books:

After attending to the morning routine the next day, Saturday, Chettiár collected about hundred books from his shelf and had them divided into three bundles and got them tied in towels. The bundles were loaded in his single bullock-cart. Both of us also mounted the cart, and the cart left.

"Should we not have your ability displayed to the teachers in the college? I'm taking you only for that purpose," said Chettiár.

"To see Mr.Gopála Rao?" I asked.

"He is the presiding deity. Before seeing him we should see other subsidiary godheads."

We went to the house of Sádhu Seshayyer, the vice-principal of the college. The book bundles were placed on a large round table in his room upstairs. Seshayyer had gone out on some errand. Chettiár picked up a piece of paper and wrote a note: " I have brought the person whom I have suggested as my replacement. You may kindly come over here, test him in person and find out the truth of my statements about him." He placed the note in an envelope and sent it through a person to be shown to R.V.Srinivása Iyer and other teachers. Looking at all this, I wondered if Chet-

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tiár was convening a major conference on my account.

In a short while, R.V.Srinivása Iyer arrived there with a few other teachers. Seshayyer too returned . On looking at the huge bundles of books he asked, "What's all this?"

"All are Tamil books," said Chettiár. Then he introduced me to them.

One of the teachers exclaimed in surprise. "Are there so many books in Tamil?"

"There are many more. There are also thousands of texts in palm-manuscripts which have still not appeared in print." Chettiár's answer increased that teacher's amazement.

Another teacher asked, "What kind of books are these? And why so many?"

"Epics like *Kanda Puránam*, *Kamba Rámáyanam*, *Bháratham* and *Naidatham*, many *Prabandams*, many Puránás of sacred sites, and Grammar Texts such as Nannool - the bundles contain all these and more. Any of you can pick up any book of your choice, open any page, hand it over to him and raise questions about the subject-matter, the setting and the meanings of that portion. He will be able to answer you clearly. This would go to confirm that all I had earlier said was true," Chettiár explained.

Ādeena Scholar:

Next, Chettiár looked at me and asked me to show them the testimonial given by Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt Head. I gave it to Chettiár. He gave it, in turn, to a teacher by name P.Hanumantha Ráo and asked him to read it. He began to read it aloud - "Sáminátha Iyer, the bearer of this note, has been our Court Poet …", stopped there, and looked at the

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faces around. There were no punctuation marks in that piece of writing and one could stop at any point. Subramania Desikar had referred to Meenákshisundaram Pillai as the Court Poet and had added that Sáminátha Iyer had studied under him various aspects of Grammar and Literature over a period of six years. The way Hanumantha Ráo had paused half way in the sentence suggesting that the honorific title had referred to me, brought me an unintended initial advantage. Everyone looked at me in wonderment as the Court Poet. I looked at it with a peculiar pleasure as a favourable turn of destiny.

The Test:

Everyone present there picked up one book each. At first one teacher picked up '*Prabhu Linga Leelai*', turned a page, pointed to a verse and asked me to explain the meaning. I read it out melodiously and explained the details _ the setting of the verse and its meaning.

At this point , a teacher by name Sivaráma Iyer said: "You may all test him the way you want. As far as I am concerned I'm totally satisfied. He also has knowledge of music. He reads out the verses in pleasing melody."

Another person said, "Even while reading, he pauses at the appropriate places, and this rhythm itself clearly highlights the meaning."

Then, Sádhu Seshayyer pointed to a few verses from *Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam*. I read it out appropriately and also spelt out the meaning.

R.V.Srinivása Iyer raised some searching questions on the grammar text *Nannool*. I answered all the questions satisfactorily. Thus, each teacher raised questions of his choice and they were all satisfied with my answers.

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Skill in Composing Poetry:

At that point Chettiár said that I was also trained in composing poetry extempore, and asked me to recite a few verses composed by me. I did so accordingly. Srinivása Iyer added, "We should, in fact, test his teaching ability. There is no great need to dwell upon his ability to compose poetry."

"It appears as if you might even find him wanting because of this rare ability of his," Chettiár said. Everyone laughed.

"In that case, can he compose and recite such poetry?" Another teacher raised this point.

Chettiár clarified, "Give him any subject. He would incorporate that in a verse and recite."

While they were mulling over choosing a suitable topic, Chettiár suggested that I could compose a verse on Seshayyer. Sheshayyer interjected saying, "Let it be about Lord Árávāmudan." Another teacher said, "If it is about Lord Árávāmudan he could well recite some old composition," and suggested that it may be about Srinivása Iyer. Srinivása Iyer had a different take on the matter. "Chettiár is the Tamil Teacher for all of us here. It would well be appropriate if the proposed verse dealt with his prowess." Everyone, including Seshayyer, endorsed the idea.

"Eventually, have you dragged me in? Ok, you better also mention the matter to be dealt with in the verse," said Chettiár.

Then Srinivása Iyer said, "Chettiár had first studied under Meenákshisundaram Pillai. You studied under him only later. Therefore, you two have a senior-junior relationship in a lineage. On this basis, you request Chettiár to try to fix his job for you. Keeping this idea in mind you should

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compose, within five minutes, one verse in *Arisikkazhi Nediladi Ásiriya Viruttham*".

The Verse I composed:

Everyone remained silent. Chettiár kept looking at my face. Signs of worry started appearing on his face. After taking in the matter, I was composing the verse in my mind. Chettiár's eyes were riveted on me. Maybe, he was worried if I would succeed or not. Four minutes passed. In the fifth minute, I recited the verse:

'Váindhapugazh padaithilangu Meenákshi
Sundaraná valan palay
aeinthamizh áidhamuraik kiyaivuranee
idhukárum inidhin meya
áindhavala nagark kudandai collegil
ninnidamer kalithal nandrae
veinthamizh mudharpulamai Thyágará
sappeyarkol maenmai yonae.'

(A senior student
Under Meenákshisundaram
The great mentor,
With mastery in words,
Whom fame came seeking,
To him God do give the place.
You adorned in Kudanthai College.
Befitting would it be _
To your name Thyágarásan
The King of Sacrifice
Profound of erudition
In Tamil eminent.')

The moment I completed the verse, Chettiár jumped in joy and shouted, "You have redeemed my honour." Everyone around warmly applauded.

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I explained the meaning of the verse. Chettiár added his bit and told the others, "We should particularly appreciate the term '*Váindha*' appearing in the verse. To use such a word under time-pressure would be possible only for those trained under the great Pillaivál. It means fame that comes seeking, unsolicited".

While I completed giving the meaning, I pointed out that Chettiár's name Thyágarásá indeed meant the 'Noble Lord of Benefactors.' I also added, 'This name will be appropriate for you only if you are gracious enough to grant me your job; not otherwise.'

Srinivása Iyer was also very pleased and said, "It is indeed amazing how he has managed to incorporate all these ideas into one stanza, and that too so quickly." Everyone expressed appreciation and satisfaction. "We should see Mr.Gopála Ráo in the evening. Stay on here. I'll come and take you," said Chettiár and left for his house. The others also returned to their homes.

I had my meal at Seshayyer's house that day. Chettiár took me to Gopála Ráo's house at five in the evening. The book bundles also accompanied us. Seshayyer, Hanumantha Rao and Srinivása Iyer were already there.

Gopála Ráo:

Gopála Ráo was then in his room upstairs. As a great lover of books, that savant rejoiced reading books in solitude. Others would be afraid to approach him, on such occasions.

We had all assembled in a hall in the ground floor. As we were wondering how to broach the subject, Hanumantha Ráo went upstairs and told Gopála Ráo of our visit.

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We were all waiting for Gopála Ráo's arrival. After a while, he slowly came down the steps. The immaculate dress, the commanding look and the caste-mark on his forehead were marks of his majestic appearance. He appeared like a paragon of purity. Chettiár greeted him respectfully and said, "As I had already submitted to you, I have brought the person I had proposed as my replacement. You may like to test him, as appropriate."

"There is no need for me to conduct any test. Your word is enough of a testimony," Gopála Ráo said. At that point, I handed over to him the letter from Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt Head. He read the letter. Sheshayyer started discussing something with him in English. He explained in detail the glory of the Mutt, the eminence of Pillaivál, my tenure as his student, my experience of having taught Tamil texts at the Mutt and outlined in detail all that happened at the morning meeting. Gopála Ráo looked at me closely. Srinivása Iyer prompted me, "You may now recite the poem you had composed in the morning." As I did not clearly remember the verse, I was trying to recall the position of various words. I took some fifteen minutes to repeat it. Srinivása Iyer asked me in surprise, "You had composed and recited in a mere five minutes in the morning. Why this delay now?" "If you ask me to compose a new verse, I will do so immediately. As you asked me to repeat a verse I had composed earlier, I was trying to recall the words and their relative positioning."

"The verse is marked by limpid style and simple diction. Such an approach is well appreciated in English," said Gopála Ráo. I felt as if a thousand persons had jointly applauded me.

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Unwritten Orders:

Then Chettiár pointed to the books he had brought and told Gopála Ráo, "You can choose any book and test him on that text". When Gopála Ráo said that there was no need for it, Chettiár still insisted. So, he opened a book and handed it over to me. It was Kamba Rámáyanam, *Ayodhyá* canto, the beginning of the section on *Manthará*'s plot.

I read it out from the beginning and explained the meaning. A satisfied Gopála Ráo told Chettiár, "What you have said is true. There is no scope for me to object. What greater testimony do I need than the unanimous endorsement of yours and other teachers? Please hand over your 'time-table' to him. Let him join the college from coming Monday."

Those words uttered in person by the Principal of the college virtually constituted my Order of Appointment - an appointment obtained without even an application. It was a case of '*Ezhudhák Kilavi*' in Tamil prosody (unwritten Order). Even after so many years those words are still ringing in my ears.

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83. MY FIRST DAY IN COLLEGE

Gopála Ráo's words of endorsement filled Thyágarása Chettiár with immense joy. As he had thought and planned over a long time, and managed to get me out of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt after thoughtful attempt, he was concerned that his effort should bear fruit. He tried with a grim determination to accomplish the task before him, and fulfil it effectively.

My Request:

While accepting the gracious offer of Gopála Ráo, I put forward a polite request: "I am new to this job. I would request you to permit Chettiiár to train me for a few days in teaching college students."

Chettiár said with a smile. "This is unbecoming modesty. He has already taught major Tamil texts while at the Mutt. So, teaching here in the college is no big deal. In fact, he is better than me in many areas. He has studied about one lakh verses."

Then we all took leave of the principal. Sādhu Seshayyar had told me that I could stay with him and have my food in his house till my parents' arrival. I did so accordingly. I told the Iyer who had accompanied me from Thiruvároor, to inform suitably my parents and the Sannidánam about all the day's happenings.

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Remembering Pillaivál:

The next day was a Sunday(15.2.1880). That morning I went to Chettiár's house to have a chat with him. He kept expressing joy on my landing the job. He also briefed me on how many others had tried for the job. "There are a few students of mine who are qualified. Muthi Chidambaram Pillai is one of them. I am also very fond of him. At one point, I had thought of fixing this job for him. Another student of mine by name Sadhásiva Chettiár had also recommended a person known to him. Further, I learnt that a few persons had directly submitted their application to the principal. In the midst of all this, I had strongly resolved that I should bring you here. I didn't disclose this to anyone. I had only informed principal Gopála Ráo and a few other teachers. You may recall that I had tried to fix a job for you during Pillaivál's time. But, you didn't agree. Ayyá also was not inclined to let you go. It is as well that you didn't take up a job at that point. If Ayyá were alive today, he would be more delighted than anyone else. Even though he is not around, I'm satisfied that this pleases Sannidánam. This is a prestigious position. Its value would keep increasing and would never decline. I can declare without hesitation that your having landed the job without any hassle, is the grace of Pillaivál's affection for you."

I was immediately filled with Pillaivál's memory. I realized that whatever Thyágarása Chettiár said was hundred percent true. I thought that if Pillaivál were alive then, his joy would have been boundless. I saw in my mind's eye the benign face of that great savant suffused with motherly love.

Chettiár's words dragged me from my fond recollections of Pillaivál. "This world is a cruel place. One has to

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tread carefully and win a good name. Our esteem is based only on our learning. You shouldn't renounce this thirst for learning, but should constantly be improving upon it by hard work. If our behaviour with the college students is agreeable, we can win their respect and affection. Your teaching must be marked by clarity. You should often raise questions on the lessons already completed. You should deal with the other teachers warily." He counselled me on these and on other matters.

I had to start my work in the college on Monday. On consulting an astrologer, we found any time after 12 noon to be auspicious.

"Better be ready by 11.30 tomorrow. I will go to the college and send word for you. You can then come there." Chettiár gave me leave.

That evening I went and offered worship at all important temples in the town.

I Entered The College:

On Monday, after my meal, I was waiting at Seshayyer's house. As directed by Chettiár, two students came from the college at 11.30 to take me there. I put on the coat given by Subramania Desikar, tossed the upper cloth over it, wore the turban and started. When I recall that scene, I can't help breaking into a smile.

Thyágarása Chettiár and R.V.Srinivása Iyer were waiting for me near a pillar at the western end of the college corridor. They greeted me and took me in. There was no Tamil class during the time earlier chosen to be auspicious. The two of them took me to the Second Year F.A. class. Hanumantha Ráo was taking the class there. They had already informed him that I had to start by teaching at the auspi-

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cious time and had suggested to him to allot his period to me. Therefore, as soon as we entered the class, Hanumantha Ráo rose from his seat and welcomed us.

Hanumantha Ráo pointed to the chair in the raised platform and asked me to take the seat. I could not bring myself to occupy the only chair there in the presence of all of them.

Sensing my reserve, Chettiár told me with a mild smile, "This is not Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. It is your duty to occupy the chair." I did so with some hesitation. Hanumantha Ráo, Srinivása Iyer, Thyágarása Chettiár and some other teachers with spare time were sitting in a bench opposite. There were more than seventy students in the class. Twenty students with government scholarship were occupying the front rows. Many students in the class appeared to be older than I was.

I begin to teach:

I meditated for a full minute on Vináyaká and other gods, and began to teach. I took up the chapter on '*Iravaccham*' (Dread of Begging) from *Náladiyár* and taught it from the beginning.

As I have already had experience of teaching at the Mutt, I had no platform fright, nor did I tire easily. I recited the first verse musically in *Shankarábharanam Rágá*. I had learnt from experience that it would be easy to attract school kids if the verses are rendered musically.

This was the first verse I taught:

'*Nammálae yávarin nalkoorndhár engyándrum*
Thammálám ákkam ilarendru - thammai
Maruda manathárbin selbavo thámum
Therunda arivi navar.'

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(The snooty man of wealth
With disdain dismiss the poor,
Of no use to the indigent
Nor even to themselves.
Will anyone of discernment
Follow such pompous psychotics?)

While spelling out the meaning, I explained how many rich people arrogantly insult the poor, how many brag about the little they have provided and belittling the recipients, and how they make the poor lament their lot that fate has condemned them to receive help from such an arrogant person. While teaching a verse, if we provide only word-for-word meaning and stop there, the listeners' attention would flag. So I provided similes, cited parallel situations we experience frequently and managed to attract the attention of the students to the meaning of the verse.

I completed five verses during the one-hour period. When I was explaining the indignity of seeking alms, with appropriate examples, Chettiár quoted a stanza from '*Kuchela Upágnánam*' (Beginning with '*Pallelám theriyak Kátti* '(showing all teeth without shame) and explained the matter further.

The Second Lesson:

As soon as the bell rang, I moved to the next class. Chettiár called the students aside, and ascertained their opinion about the lesson I had just completed. The students expressed their full satisfaction.

"I have brought him here with considerable difficulty; you must deal with him respectfully. You should treat him like you have been treating me, " Chettiár told them. Later he introduced to me some of the students individually.

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The next lesson was for the First Year B.A.Class. Chettiár and a few teachers also came along. As desired by Seshayyer, Sanskrit pundit Perugavázhndhán Rangácháriár was also there. I started teaching the portion in Kamba Rámáyanam dealing with Akaligai. I recited the first verse in Sahána rágá and explained the meaning. While I was teaching, the eyes of the students were riveted on me. Chettiár was closely observing their faces. He was happy to find satisfaction writ large on their faces. At that point, Rangácháriár objected to one aspect of my explanation. When I was about to explain my position, Chettiár rushed to him with folded hands and told him "Let your respected self not open his gracious mouth at this point. It is enough if you observe the way he expatiates on the meaning to the students. This is not the occasion for disputation. Further, he is a young man. You are a mature elder. If the renowned Sanskrit savant raises a controversy, my objective will not be fulfilled. Please understand." I had earlier observed Chettiár boldly contradicting others during discussions. I then realized that he would not hesitate to do the same in the college as well.

The lesson continued. A reference in Akaligai section: In the heaven a celestial woman sings a verse paying obeisance to Lakshmi. Lakshmi enjoys it and hands over a garland to her. That woman takes the garland and places it around her musical instrument '*Yázh*' - that was the message. A verse starts with a line '*Anna Málaiyai Yázhidai Piditthu* (Tying the garland to her Yázh). When I was explaining the meaning, Chettiár interjected with the remark, "Students of these days would rather tie their garland to their pet dog." Everyone laughed heartily.

Afternoon Events:

That period was over. I had my snacks during the interval. We went to the F.A First Year class in the afternoon.

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There were more than eighty students in the class. We began with the section dealing with phonology in '*Nannool*'. I read out the first formula and made a request to Chettiár: "A request, Sir. Could you please teach a few formulae to enable me to understand the method of exposition." He obliged me, and also raised a few questions with the students. I got many useful tips from him.

Then we went to the B.A. Second Year class. The students in that class had studied under Chettiár for three years. They had to appear for the Public Examinations later that year. There were twelve students in the class. Among them were S.Rădhákirishna Iyer (Principal in Pudukkottai), Bálakrishna Iyer (a reputed lawyer) and Seetháráma Iyer (A teacher in Thirunelveli Hindu College).

This was a class on "*Náttup-Padalam*'(Chapter on the country) in Kamba Rámayanam. I recited and explained the meaning of a stanza starting with '*Vánga arumpádha nángum vaguthavan meedhi enbán*' . Then I raised some grammatical questions.

I asked one of the students: "What is the grammatical relation of the words '*Arum Padham*' ('difficult words') in '*Ván karumpádham*?" He said, "Relative principle." This was a wrong answer, since the word 'arum' is a qualifier, and the whole expression is regarded as a qualifying or an Attributive compound.

Chettiár who was then present beat his head in disgust, looked at that student and exclaimed, "However hard you teach, some are too dense. If a guy who had studied under me for three years commits such a blunder, it is indeed a shame on me." Then he looked at me and said, "Maybe in my ripe old age, I may not have explained adequately. Maybe, that's why I'm leaving the job. You must teach well

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and effectively."

I continued the lesson. The bell rang and we left the college.

In the very first day itself, I developed a confidence that I could handle the job well. The students, the other teachers and above all, Thyágarása Chettiár were satisfied that I was suitable for the job.

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84. A SHOT IN THE ARM

The second day (17.2.1880) at the college. Thyágarásа Chettiár came after 3 in the afternoon and observed my teaching. Around 3.45, Srinivása Iyer came to Chettiár and told him, "Ráyar asked me what was the Tamil class after 4 today. It is possible that he might attend the class. Ask him to handle the class carefully." As soon as the class was over Chettiár informed me about this. "Don't get scared of Ráyar's presence and fumble. Take the class carefully and confidently. It is not important that we teachers are satisfied. Ráyar's satisfaction is the most significant. You must leave a good impression on him." He sounded a note of caution.

Gopála Rao arrives:

I entered the B.A. Second Year class. Chettiár also came with me. I started the Nannool lessons. I was explaining the grammatical rule '*Ondre Iru Thinai Thanpál Aerkkum*' from the *Peyariyal* section of *Nannool*. At that point an attendant brought a chair and placed it near me. The next minute Gopála Rao arrived. I stood up and greeted him. He said, "Go ahead with your lessons," and sat down in his chair. I explained the formula with meaning and examples, and also raised a few questions with the students. Ráyar picked up the Nannool text from a student, opened it and followed my teaching.

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I was not in the least troubled by his presence. I continued ot teach with enthusiasm. Thyágarása Chettiár had already told me that Ráyar was well-versed in Nannool. This knowledge only gave me added zest. As I had studied Nannool from my earliest days, had researched on it from different angles, and had organized my understanding suitably and had also committed the text to memory, I found teaching Nannool a mere child's play. I collated information scattered in the text and elucidated the matter. I continued with my explanation with a hope that I could impress Ráyar with my mastery of the text.

On other occasions Chettiár used to intervene and raise questions often. At that point, however, he was simply sitting there very observantly. He was trying to ascertain Ráyar's opinion from his facial expressions.

But, Gopála Ráo was in no mood to give any such hint. His face had his usual pleasant aspect. He was not used to reflect his likes and dislikes in his body language. There was a majesty about him. Others could not easily discern his opinion. Chettiár was restless, without any useful hint Ráyar.

Chettiár is eager:

It was five. Gopála Ráo handed over the Nannool book to the student and rose. Chettiár and I also stood up. I was also eager to know about Gopála Ráo's opinion. But, how to unearth it? At that point, a student by name Krishna Iyer suddenly stood up and told Ráyar, "One submission Sir. We were all worried till yesterday about respected Chettiár leaving the job. We were wondering what lay ahead for us. We no longer have any such worry. Chettiár has brought a good replacement for him and erased our misgivings."

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I looked at him in surprise regarding his bold assertion. Chettiár's eyes landed on him benevolently. Ráyar looked at the student with a gentle smile and left. We too left.

Chettiár checked up with all the college teachers regarding the possible opinion of Ráyar on my teaching.

"His opinion appears to be favourable," said a few. Sheshayyer and others, somewhat close to Ráyar, said, "It appears that Ráyar feels that he explains things lucidly to the students".

Then Chettiár looked at me and said, "Ráyar might come like this often and observe your teaching. Whenever he so comes, do keep me informed."

News from the Mutt:

Through the week I performed my duties with considerable enthusiasm. I used to visit Chettiár in his house each morning and evening. I would brief him on the day's happenings.

Someone or the other came from Thiruvávaduthurai everyday to meet me and ascertain what was happening. One Deivasigámani Iyer, who was my student at the Mutt, came for a few days and gathered information about me. I came to know through him that Subramania Desikar was happily sharing my progress with those who called on him.

Desikar enquired about me with anyone visiting him from Kumbakonam. Relatives of the students in the college occasionally visited the Mutt. They would inform Desikar that boys from their family studied at Kumbakonam College and had positive things to say about me. Desikar would be happy to hear this. Many persons with love for Tamil and affection for me used to stand outside the class and observe my teaching, and compliment me when I came out of

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the class. All these developments completely rid me of any worry about handling the new assignment efficiently.

I had been happily taking classes in Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt; the pleasure I derived there was of one kind. The satisfaction I gained at Kumbakonam was of a different kind. While there were common elements in both institutions in matters of disciplined approach to work, there was one distinctive feature in the Mutt. The long tradition of the Mutt, demands of Mutt administration and Tamil learning remained blended there; but my involvement was restricted to Tamil learning. Subramania Desikar had to divide his time between various demands. In the college, however, education was the exclusive concern. No matter, however important, interfered with education there. Even while at the Mutt, our focussed interest in Tamil learning was not allowed to be affected in the midst of peers involved in other Mutt activities. Here in the college, I could concentrate on teaching in a defined framework of time and work and according to a specific teaching structure. I found this arrangement a real pleasure.

I go to Thiruvávaduthurai:

I was very eager to meet my parents and Desikar and tell them how happy I was in my new life. I would have gone that Friday as soon as the classes were over. But, there was no train around at that time. So I took the train on Saturday morning, reached Thiruvávaduthurai and went home straight. Everyone was expecting my arrival. Ammá was waiting at the doorstep with a brass salver full of turmeric solution. As soon as she saw me she waved the salver in front of me. (To ward off 'evil eyes') and lovingly called me in - "Come in, darling."

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My mother and father riddled me with a thousand questions. In the midst of answering the volley of questions I completed my bath and meal. Having informed them about my job to a certain extent, I rushed to the Mutt. I found the Mutt Head seated in his State room in the company of a few devotees, his face wreathed in a benign smile. The pleasure we both had on seeing each other was indeed indescribable.

Desikar's satisfaction:

"We constantly talk about you. I was always confident that you would land the job without any problem and that your colleagues and students would be very happy with your teaching. We are delighted that you are gaining a good name, as I had anticipated." His words fell on my ears like nectar. My ears which had been starved of his sweet words felt fulfilled.

My heart was full, drinking in the affection permeating his words. I was too full of emotion to find my voice immediately. After a few minutes I softly said, "All due to Sannidhánam's grace," and read out a poem I had composed:

"Arrrárkku tháyanaiya Thuraisayir Subramania Ama lan dranpál
Kattrárkku kuraiyuladho matravandran thirumugath aik kannir kána
Petrárkku thuyaruladho vuraippamiga vinikkumavan peyarai váyál
Sotrárkku thuyaruladho yirumpuviyi návarkál sollu veerae.

(Can anything be wanting
For those tutored under
Subramanian of Thuraisai,
Free from blemish

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And mother to the destitute?
Can any worry there be
For the scholars
Who gain his audience?
Can trouble haunt those
Who sing his name
So mellifluous to pronounce?
Tell me, O scholars
Of the wide wide world!)

Desikar felt that the verse had emanated from the sheer joy bubbling in my heart. Then, he enquired in detail about everything. He eagerly took in whatever I said, as if it were something new and wonderful.

Friends Amazed!

I spent Saturday and Sunday at Thiruvávaduthurai and was immersed in discussions with Desikar as often as possible. I also briefed the Junior Mutt Head Namachiváya Desikar. All the friends in the Mutt swarmed round me and eagerly enquired about the college matters. They had already known about the college's reputation and its external appearance. They heard with wonderment Gopála Ráo's magnanimity, the ability of the teachers, the nature of students, the discipline in the classes and the many facilities offered to me. Their enthusiasm to know these details appeared like those listening to the accounts of a friend who had gone abroad and just then returned.

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85. GOPÁLA RÁO'S KINDNESS

I completed my Monday classes. On Tuesday morning I started taking lessons on Náladiyár for the II Year F.A class. At that point, Gopála Ráo who had been taking a visiting official around the college, stepped into my class with him.

I rose from my chair on seeing them. Gopála Ráo asked me to resume my seat, got two chairs brought in, requested the visitor to be seated in one chair and he occupied the other. On seeing this, I thought that they were planning to spend some time in my class and to observe my teaching. I resumed my teaching. Gopála Ráo and his friend were observing me closely.

The verse I had taken up then, was a very interesting one. The thrust of the verse was on these lines: "When we still have the resources and energy, we should offer charity. If we choose to postpone it to a later date that day could never arrive." I narrated a story to highlight this message.

The story I told:

A person earned handsomely during his life; ensured all his comforts and facilities. But the thought of charity never occurred to him.

He was growing in years. His sons had got settled. There was no provision those days to keep the savings secure. So, he used to bundle his money in a cloth and had it

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buried somewhere in the house. After a few years, the old man took ill and was in death-bed. He lost his capacity to speak. He was surrounded by his sons and relatives. With a view to fulfilling his last wish, they kept asking him, 'What do you want?'

When the old man was struggling against death, a friend of his admonished that he had not spent a pie on charity and urged him to do so at least then. On hearing his words, the old man was inclined to perform an act of dharmá. He remembered a small bundle of gold coins he had buried inside a wall somewhere in the house. While he desired to use the wealth to perform some charity, he was not in a fit condition to do that. He had also lost his voice and could not express his idea clearly.

What could he do at that point? His eagerness to communicate his thought kept increasing. With great difficulty he wanted to communicate 'such a large bundle of gold'; he pointed to the wall and gave an indication with his hand. Those around could not figure out what he was trying to say. "Ayyo, he is asking for something. What a pity that at this stage, we can't even make out what he wants," some people around wailed.

One of his sons exclaimed, "I got it. He used to be very fond of sour wood-apple. That's what he wants. Alas, this is not the season for it. Still, let me try," and rushed out. Before he returned, the old man was dead.

That son started sobbing and wailing uncontrollably, "Ayyo, he gave an indication that he wanted his wood-apple. I am a vile sinner who couldn't fulfill his last wish."

There was no connection whatever between what the old man thought and what his son did. Bundle of gold ended up as measly sour wood-apple.

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Ráyar laughs:

After I explained this story in some detail, Gopála Ráo burst out laughing. No one had seen him laugh so openly before. I felt pleased that the charm of the story had induced this laughter.

I continued my lesson: "A miser in the throes of death may suddenly decide to indulge in a charitable act; even this last wish does not get fulfilled. So, we should perform charitable acts early enough to serve us in our afterlife. Like a person on pilgrimage carrying a bundle of food, we should gather this bundle of *dharma* for our salvation. The following verse highlights this point."

And I recited the verse:

'*Sirukálai yethamakku selvazhi valsi;*
Irugirugath thotkoeppuk kollár- irugirugip
Pinnarivá mendrirukkum pedhaiyár kaikáttum
Ponnum pulivilangá yam.'

(The tight-fisted fools
Grab what they have
Postponing charity
To a distant tomorrow.
The food bundle of dharma
Carry not when young
On their shoulders
To fend for their birth again
Their finger pointing to gold
Mistaken for wood-apple.)

The teacher scheduled to handle the next period for their class had not come that day. So, I continued my Tamil lesson for one more hour. Gopála Ráo and his friend continued to be in the classroom for full two hours and listened

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to my lesson.

The period was over. Both of them rose from their seats. Gopála ráo looked at me with a gentle smile. His look was full of kindness; his smile was marked by satisfaction.

I took leave and set out for my meal.

Chettiár's eagerness:

As usual, I went to Thyágarása Chettiár's house that evening and briefed him about Gopála Ráo's visit to my class and the events there.

Chettiár asked eagerly, "Do you know what opinion he has formed? He has to write to the higher authorities about you. What is he going to write?"

"How would I know that?", I replied.

Chettiár spent a sleepless night. He was so very keen that Gopála Ráo should send a favourable Report about me to the higher authorities and get my appointment order confirmed. With this concern in mind, he was on pins and needles to find out about Gopála Ráo's opinion. As I was confident that everything would work out well, Chettiár's concern surprised me.

As soon as the college opened the next day, Chettiár went there, met the Head Clerk and asked him, "What is Ráyar's opinion about Sáminátha Iyer?"

Good News:

He gave the good news. "Ráyar has written favourably about him to the Director. I am about to send the letter by post," said the Head Clerk. Only after hearing these words, Thyágarása Chettiár heaved a sigh of relief. He wouldn't leave the Head Clerk at that. He kept pestering him to find

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out what exactly Ráyar had written. He had written that I had gained proficiency in Tamil as a student in the Mutt and that I had rich experience of having taught a number of students there. The Head Clerk also referred to the following remarks made by the principal in his letter: "I myself observed his teaching on two occasions. His method of teaching is very satisfactory. Therefore, we may give him a monthly salary of Rs.50 as has hitherto been given to Thyágarása Chettiár and appoint him on probation for two years."

Then Chettiár told me with evident glee, "All worries have disappeared. By god's grace, my effort has borne fruit. Hereafter, it is up to you and your students."

"All due to your abundant affection for me," I told him with profound gratefulness.

After this major development, Gopál Ráo lavished his kindness on me. Whenever he saw me he would tell me affectionately, "Are the classes going on well? Is everything in order? If anyone fails to behave properly, do tell me at once. If you want to get anything done, do tell me at once. Don't hesitate to approach me." These words bore testimony that he had fully accepted me under his protective care.

Chettiár and I spent a pleasant weekend at Thiruvávaduthurai. When we were leaving, Subramania Desikar told me clearly, "If they give you the fifty rupees being given to Chettiár, you continue there; otherwise you quit the job and get back here."

Gopála Rao's announcement:

On Monday morning I was handling the B.A Second Year twelve-to-one class. I continued a little longer beyond one o' clock. Suddenly all the students stood up. "Why are

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you standing?" I asked them. "Ráyar is standing in the corridor and looking at you," they said. At once I went towards him. He told me, "The Director has issued an Order to appoint you for two years on a probationary basis, at a monthly salary of 50 rupees as was being given to Chettiár." I showed my joy by the expression on my face.

The other teachers were happy at this news. Thyágarásа Chettiár's joy knew no bounds. I can scarcely express the extent of my joy.

First Salary:

The next evening, with this joy surging within me, I went to Thiruvávauthurai with a half - month salary. Chettiár had told me, "You place your first salary at your parents' feet and take it back with their blessings". Accordingly I first handed over the twenty-five rupees to my mother. She collected it and placed it on her eyes reverentially. If someone else had given her a lakh of rupees, it wouldn't have given her half that joy. Then I handed over the money to my father and Subramania Desikar and received it back with their blessings.

"You are the son of such a staunch devotee. You should get higher salary and more eminent position," Desikar blessed me warmly.

Till then I was staying in Sri Sádhu Seshayyer's house in Kumbakonam and was also having my meals there. That week, I took my parents along with me to Kumbakonam. We rented a small house in Bhakthapuri Agraháram and lived there for a few months.

Examination and Holidays:

The college examinations were held towards the end of March. Those days the university examinations were held

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only in the month of December. For the March examination, I set up the question paper with Chettiár's help. After the examinations were over, I corrected the answer sheets in Chettiár's presence, prepared the mark list systematically and submitted the list to the principal.

The summer holidays commenced. I collected the salary and went to Thiruvávaduthurai with my parents. At that time, my 'seemandam' ceremony was celebrated at Thiruvávaduthurai. My salary was found to be useful. We received a lot of help from Desikar.

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86. HOLIDAY EVENTS

While at Thiruvávaduthurai, I used to attend weddings in the houses of dignitaries in the surrounding villages, as a representative of the Mutt. It was customary for the Sannidhánam to present garments and other presents to the bride and the bridegroom. I carried them and made a formal presentation. When I was in Thiruvávaduthurai during the summer vacation, one such occasion arose. During the month of May, Kumbakonam College teacher Sri Sádhu Seshayyer's eldest daughter's wedding was celebrated. He conducted the event in a grand manner in Thiruppádhiripuliyur. As Seshayyer was a very influential person, the wedding was attended by judges, district munsiffs and Thásildárs, as also other dignitaries, many scholars and college teachers. The total expenditure exceeded ten thousand rupees. One can imagine the grandeur of the event from this level of expenditure during those distant days.

The wedding in Seshayyer's house:

All the teachers of Kumbakonam College attended the wedding. I too was there, as a teacher in the college and as a representative of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. I had never before witnessed such a largely attended wedding. Thiruppádhiripuliyur was bursting in excitement, as if a huge festival was taking place. Many people had assembled, just to see the many important and famous personages gracing the occasion. There was a talk that Sir. T. Muthusámi Iyer,

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the famous judge of the Madras High Court, was expected to come. It was a time when his reputation had spread far and wide in Tamil Nádu. Everyone around was eager to see him. News spread that he would attend the fifth day of the wedding. So, even those who had planned to leave earlier extended their stay just to see him.

An Old Man:

One evening a few teachers and I set out towards the Kedilam river. An old Brahmin wearing a thick coat of '*vibhoothi*' on his forehead and wearing Rudhrákshá beads, was coming from the opposite direction. As we were walking in a group, the old man lingered for a while, screened his eyes with his hand and started watching us. Among the teachers was one Káli Náráyanasámi Iyer of Vánáthurai in Kumbakonam. He was given to pleasant and funny ways. He looked at the old man and asked him, "What makes you stare like this?"

"Nothing special. Have you guys come for the wedding in Sheshappá's house? People seemed to have assembled from all over the Presidency! Where are you people from? And, what is your job like?"

"We are all teachers from Kumbakonam. Sure enough, we have come to attend the wedding," replied Náráyanasámi Iyer.

He started questioning everyone separately about his name, native place and salary. He was amazed when he heard about the salary levels of one hundred, two hundred and three hundred. "What?" he exclaimed and added, "Such salaries for school teachers? In our days they were getting only four or five rupees. A salary of ten rupees was a princely sum." We realized that the old man was equating

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us with a Thinnai School teachers in the villages. After all, aren't all of them school teachers?'

He went on: "It is these White men who lavished salaries in hundred and two hundred. You guys are also lucky. Only these days I see people getting such handsome salaries month after month. They do get salaries, alright. But....." The old man paused for a while. It appeared as if he was wondering whether to be candid.

"You are about to say something. What has made you stop?" Náráyanasámi Iyer asked.

In the meanwhile the old man lost the continuity. He set his eyes on me. The talk turned in my direction. "Who is this young boy? Is he a student in your school?" He asked.

"No. he is also a teacher."

His amazement knew no bounds.

"What! This kid is also a teacher! What is his salary like?"

Náráyanasámi Iyer replied with an exaggerated emphasis, "Fifty rupees."

"Really? All divine dispensation....I was saying something, right?" He was trying to connect with what he was saying earlier.

"People get fancy salaries. They realize that it is god's grace. But, do they pray to god? I believe not. Do they observe the prescribed rites? They don't. Simply because they are getting the salary from the White man, they fancy themselves to be White men too."

"Are you bracketing us too with those tribe? Do you know that we are all now going to Kedilam river?" Náráyanasámi replied with a smile.

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"Really! Going to perform Sandyávandanam, the evening worship? Good, good! When all is said and done, our traditions are sacred to us. It is our duty to preserve them."

Having unloaded his share of advice, he took leave of us, fearing that he might delay our evening rituals. I found his words wise and sweet. As one who had spent a number of years in the company of persons steeped in divine devotion and regular religious rites, I found the old man's counsel very valuable.

Justice Muthusámi Iyer:

On the fifth day of the wedding, Muthusámi Iyer arrived in Thiruppádiripuliyur at two in the afternoon. Sádhu Seshayyer went to the Rail station, received him and took him to his house. Muthusámi Iyer took his seat in a large arm chair in the midst of everyone, under a large canopy specially erected for the wedding. Next to him was Seshayyer and two other dignitaries.

The entire village crowd had assembled in and around the canopy. Even though the crowd was large, they kept silent. Muthusámi Iyer was not extravagantly dressed, but there was a majesty about him. He was simply but elegantly dressed: a white turban, a long coat, an Iyempettai silk towel, pure white dhoti and a pair of Muslim-type slippers. He held a cane in his hand. He was occupying a position not dreamt of by Indians. His knowledge of English language, his genius and his legal erudition were well known. Not only did he earn salary on par with a White man, he also moved closely with them, even though he was a true Hindu in his appearance, speech and customs. The 'vibhoothi' and the sandal-dot on his forehead, the dhoti he was wearing in 'Panchakachá' style and the modesty in his manner of speaking - all these lent further lustre to his distinction. I

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could recall the words of the old man we had met the previous evening. 'How happy would he be to see Muthusámi Iyer?' I mused.

In the midst of the conversation Muthusámi Iyer referred to a Thirukkural verse. I could observe his love for Tamil. He spoke briefly. He referred to Thirukkural as an example of stating briefly, but with great clarity. These words got registered in my mind. He had his night feast there and left for Máyuram. The wedding celebrations came to an end. Everyone took leave. On returning to Thiruvávaduthurai I explained in detail to Subramania Desikar and others about the wedding festivities, Sir.T.Muthusámi Iyer's visit and what I had learnt in the few hours I was in his presence. The whole day was spent exchanging information about Muthusámi iyer's young days, how he had braved difficulties in his path to progress and his sterling reputation.

'Indra Izhavooredutha Kádhai' (Mourning the Death of Indra):

Those days, there was a strange method of putting together Tamil text books for the college classes. They would prescribe a portion of some book with a barely known name. Some publisher would scramble and manage to locate a related palm-leaf manuscript, and get it published as a book. On that basis, the Tamil teachers would take their lessons - a confused jumble of what they understand and what they don't. *Silappadhikáram* had then been known merely as an ancient Tamil text. It is easier to know about the eminence of a literary work than to study and understand it. So, those who had known about the glory of the work started including portions of that work in the syllabus. When Thyágarása Chettiár was teaching in the college, '*Indra Vizhavoor Eduttha Kádhai*' segment of *Silappadhikáram* was in the

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prescribed text. He looked at it with the help of a palm-leaf text. He could understand nothing. He approached Pillaivál and the two of them jointly looked at the text.

They found it to be extremely difficult to find out the authentic text, in the midst of a large number of copyists' errors that had crept in over a long time. Further, there were no tools to guide one through a network of customs and manners of an ancient age described in that work. As a result, the text remained obscure. Chettiár reacted to the text in anger. "What sort of a book is this? Is this *Indira Vizhavoor Edutha Kadhai or Indira Ezhavooredutha Kadhai*? (The story of Indirá's celebration or the story of Indirá's Demise?)". He then resolved, "I'm not going to teach this rubbish. I would rather take six months of sick leave and disappear from the scene." True to his resolve, he took off for six months and returned to the college only thereafter. During that period, Chandrasekara Kavirája Pandithar conducted the class as Tamil teacher. It was difficult to say that he actually taught the text.

If a person of Thyágarása Chettiár's erudition had to struggle with the text, it is needless to talk about the troubles faced by the other teachers. As soon as the texts are announced, publishers would rush in and produce printed versions. The first part of Silappadhikáram was brought out by Srinivása Rágavácháriyár and Sozhadasávathánam Subbaráya Chettiár of Madras. The first edition was that of Srinivása Rágavácháriyár. It contained only the main text of the front section of Pukhár canto. He had stated on the title page that it was 'Silapadhikáram composed by Seramán Perumál Náyanár.'

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Silappadhikáram Research:

During the year I took up the job, four sections of Silappadhikáram, including '*Kánal Vari*' had been included in the syllabus. I was to take this up after the summer vacation. Word reached my ears that some persons were sceptical about my ability to handle Silappadhikáram. This made me resolve that I should study and master it to the extent possible. It was difficult to discern the true meaning with the help of the then available printed text.

When I shared this problem with Subramania Desikar he told me, "There is a palm-leaf manuscript in the Mutt. You can try to learn with the Junior Mutt Head." It was unlikely that Namachiváya Desikar had proficiency in the text which had posed challenge even to Pillaivál. Even so, there was obvious advantage in researching on the matter with a bright person like him. I got hold of the Silappadhikáram palm-leaf manuscript and studied it with Namachiváya Desikar. We pored over it very meticulously. At last our labours came to an end. We could derive at an outline of its meaning.

Several days passed by in this manner. The rest of the days was spent in studying other works and in teaching.

The new house:

My father stated that we should set a permanent establishment in Kumbakonam at the end of the vacation. He set out to Kumbakonam to look around and fix a house. When he was leaving my mother told him, "It would be nice if the house is near Cáuvery." I added my bit, "It would be convenient if the house is near the college." He walked all the way to Kumbakonam. He was not used to travelling by train.

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He looked around in a few streets and was entering Bhakthapuri Agraháram. He chanced to overhear a person telling his companion, "*Mangalámbiká* is there. No need to fear." Mangalámbiká is the name of the Devi consecrated at the Kumbeshwará Temple in Kumbakonam. He found good omen in those words and decided on a house on the eastern side in the middle of the street. A monthly rent of 3½ rupees was settled. A house forty feet long and fifteen feet wide. There was also a spacious garden at the back of the house.

While the house did not appear spacious enough for the entire family, my father found it a veritable palace by virtue of the perceived good omen. As he had experienced many hardships and the bite of poverty in life, he decided to live as frugally as possible. And that house fitted well with his approach.

After settling the house, he walked back all the way to Thiruvávaduthurai. "The house is near Kāveri and also the college. You can come home for the second meal. The omen also is propitious." He sounded upbeat.

The vacation came to an end. My father was in no mood to leave Thiruvávaduthurai. He somehow persuaded himself. We took leave of Subramania Desikar and other friends, reached Kumbakonam and entered the new house. Till then, I was a Thiruvávaduthurai person. Now, I started a new life as a man of Kumbakonam.

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87. A STRESS-FREE LIFE

When I took up the job in Kumbakonam college, High school classes were also held there. One T.K. Náráyanasámi Pillai was taking Tamil lessons there.

While my college job had come seeking me, when I learnt that many persons had tried hard to get that job, I realized its value. Náráyanasámi Pillai who was a Tamil pundit in Bangalore college, Thanjávoor Sadhávadhánam Subramania Iyer who had composed Rámáyana Vennpás and several puránás and Salem college Tamil pundit Saravana Pillai were a few of those aspirants. They had applied directly to the Department of Education, and their applicans were forwarded to Gopála Ráo. Ráyar had apparently replied, "As we have already found a suitable candidate, these applications have not been taken up for consideration."

The Effort of Govinda Pillai:

When I had gone to Thiruvávaduthurai during the vacation, Sirusirapuram Vidwán Vidwa Janasekaran Govinda Pillai had come to Kumbakonam. He had learnt only about Thyágarása Chettiár leaving the job; so he approached Gopála Ráo and requested him to appoint his son in Chettiár's place. The principal told him that a suitable person had already been appointed. In response to Govinda Pillai's query, he told him that I was the one who has been ap-

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pointed. Apparently Pillai immediately replied, "I see, I'm really delighted. I do know him. He is a very good scholar."

Farewell to Thyágarása Chettiár:

Though Thyágarása Chettiár had left the job, he continued to stay in Kumbakonam for six months to sort out some problems related to his pension. Thereafter he made arrangements for his departure. As a reputed citizen of Kumbakonam he had loads of friends there. The teachers in the college as also in the other colleges held him in high esteem. They were all sad on learning about Chettiár's impending departure from Kumbakonam. They thought of arranging a nice farewell function and also wanted to give him suitable mementoes and gifts. His friends decided to present him with a garland of Rudrákshá beads with their faces set in an ascending scale and also an expensive shawl. The evening before Chettiár left, the farewell function was held under Gopála Ráo's presidentship in Vakil T.Sundaram Iyer's bungalow located in Kalyána Rámayyar Street. Many persons spoke, eulogizing Chettiár's qualities of head and heart. I paid my tribute too, reciting ten verses I had composed for the occasion. One of htem ran like this:

'Varundhi arunthamizhnamakku yárpugalvá renrengum
Manathi norgal
Thirundhisen Thamizhselvan Thyágarásap Pulavar
Thilar ranpál
Porundhiyavan vilangaveduth thuraraithidunal lurai
galaitham
Pundhi vaippin
Marundhialainth iyalunarvár kavipugalvár Prasangam
Vaguppár mannoe.'
(Those yearning

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And finding not a mentor
To teach Tamil,
If only they absorb
The exposition lucid
Of Thyágarájan
The prince of Tamil pure,
Will know
The five grammars salubrious
Will compose poems
Will deliver discourses).

At the conclusion of the function, Chettiár asked Gopála Ráo, "I am leaving tomorrow. I seek your leave. Has the person I recommended been performing satisfactorily?"

With evident happiness, Ráyar immediately replied, "As you had earlier told me, his performance has been good on all fronts. The students are also very satisfied with him. He has also showcased his talent in this very assembly." Though Chettiár had learnt about this from different sources, he desired to hear it directly from Ráyar. On hearing Ráyar's words, Chettiár looked at me with joy writ large on his face. I bent my head down in embarrassment.

After everyone dispersed I went along with Chettiár to his house. The thought of his leaving the next day filled me with grief. I had got attached to him and wanted to remain with him always. Some students were studying under him in his house. He introduced each one of them to me, stating in detail what texts they were studying and their requirements. Then he told me, "These students are learning some specific texts from me. Evidently I can't teach them any longer. Therefore, I am entrusting them to your care. Please continue to teach these texts to them."

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"I have taken up your job, and I consider this too as an important responsibility of mine," I replied. Among these students were Sadhásiva Chettiár, Kumárasámi Iyer who was a Veerasaiva, Rámalinga Pandáram, Sámi Pandáram and Krishnasámi Udaiyár.

Getting Used to Teaching:

I found no difficulty whatever in handling college lessons. I had earlier been used to teach in great detail full texts from beginning to end. So, teaching a few portions of selected texts in the college classes was no big deal. Like at the Mutt, I wanted to teach entire Prabandams and other grammar texts to someone. I realized that it would be necessary to ensure that my learning did not get to rust. Against this background, I was indeed satisfied that Chettiár had entrusted a few of his students to my care. I started teaching them. Some of the college students also came to my house individually to study some texts. A few other persons from Kumbakonam also sought my help in studying selected texts.

Chettiár's Letters:

The day after the farewell function, Chettiár left Kumbakonam and settled down in Thiruvánaikká near Thiruchirápalli. He used to write letters to his Kumbakonam friends. In the letters he sent to me, he urged me to come there during holidays and spend time with him. I also wrote letters to him.

Training in Poetry:

Initially I wrote my letters to Chettiár in prose. In one of his replies, Chettiár had remarked, "If you write like this in prose, you may lose touch with the art of composing poetry. I am not necessarily suggesting that much like

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Pillaivál, you should also be writing a verse at the top and then dwell upon the news in the letter. My idea is that you should keep alive your interest and ability in composing poetry." Thereafter verses formed an important part of my letters. On some occasions, the entire letter would be in the form of a verse. Chettiár would also write verses in his letters praising my poems.

Further, at the instance of Chettiár I started composing laudatory verses on deities as also some occasional verses. I composed many verses in praise of Lord Kumbeshwará and Lord Murugá of Swámimalai. I also put together one Irattai Manimálai on Devi Periyanáyaki consecrated in Sri Nágeshwará temple.

Cyclone and floods had caused a lot of devastation that year, uprooting many trees. I composed a few verses on this situation and shared it with friends. Here are two of those verses:

'Kazhuthuyara murumudalot thagamádhi panmirugam
kávalap palveek
Kuzhuthuyarak kamugupanai thengádi marangalkulai ku-
laiya vero
Dizhuthuyara verindhuyirgal vizhuthuyara maruvamaruth
thiyatrum noeyám
Muzhuthuyara máyavidhaik kátruyara menavevarum
Mozhivá rennae.'

(The tall long-necked camels
Herds of animals myriad
Clusters of birds varied –
All in grip of suffering.
Palms of areca, palmyrá and coconut
Uprooted, tossed sans mercy.

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All living beings
Ravaged and tormented
By this disease deadly.
A chorus rises
It is disaster
Wrought by the wind (kál) furious
But it is barely one fourth (kál) of it.)

'Urampayilum palamaramu marampayumik kátrinál odindhu sáindha
Varambaiyaru káludhaiyá levvuyirum thalaisáidhal marabá mandro
Sirampayilum pandharurum palakáliv vorukálir sidhaindhu veezhndha
Tharampayilee dhadhisayankol ondru palavatrai velal
Ságasa mandro.'

(Strong gusty winds.
Smashed and scattered
Are trees sturdy
And banana trees delicate.

Isn't it common
For lives to get
Their heads broken
By impact of 'kál'(leg / wind)?
And
It's no wonder
The tall pandal
Supported by many káls (leg/pillars)
Is pulverized by one 'kál' (wind)?

They appreciated my efforts, stating that it was a custom in the West to compose verses involving specific incidents and situations. Those verses were low in thought and high in the clever play of words. But, people those days

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enjoyed it.

Thirupananthál Head's Praise:

Subramania Desikar suggested that I should call on Rámalinga Thambirán, the then Head of Thirupananthál Kási Mutt, and inform him about my job in the college. Accordingly, I met the Thambirán during a weekend, apprised him of the developments and also had a pleasant discussion with him. While lauding me for landing the job, he added, "Your father's great piety and Pillaivál's abundant affection for you have borne fruit. It has fructified through Thyágarása Chettiár".

A few months later, Rámalinga Thambirán appointed as his second-in-command Kumárasámi Thambirán who was the Court's Scholar of Thiruvávaduthurai and was a dear friend of mine. I was exhilarated on hearing this news. I was very eager to go to Thirupananthál to see him. At the next available opportunity I saw him and conveyed my joyous greetings.

"All due to the benign grace of Sannidánam. You got a good job. Your friend has landed this position." He remarked gratefully and lavished praise on Subramania Desikar's great qualities.

My Son's Birth:

By god's grace, I was blessed with a son a few months after I took up the college job. My father went to Thiruvávaduthurai to convey the good news. When he called on Desikar and conveyed the news with an offer of candy, Sannidánam was very pleased. He ordered for a large quantity of sugar candy, distributed it to everyone in the Mutt, himself announcing gleefully "Our Sáminátha Iyer has been blessed with a male child." My father was moved

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by this expression of pure joy. Those who composed the child's horoscope declared that the family would be blessed with many more good things. This pleased my father no end. As the child was born following the prayers offered to Lord Kalyana Sundareshwarar consecrated in Thirunallur, a Saivaite holy site near Uthamadhánapuram, the child was named as Kalyanasundaram. As this name was also related to the deity in Madurai, it brought to my mind fond memories of my teacher.

Father's Help:

Though I had attained the status of a child's father, I continued to be a child under the protective care of my family. I was living in my own world, a world of books, learning and work. I was never concerned about the welfare of the family, its budget and the various ceremonies. My father shouldered all those burdens. I handed over my entire salary to Appá. Even for my little expenses, I would get money only from father. I found this kind of arrangement very convenient. There is no comfort greater than being shielded from grumblings of minor scarcities at home. My father made sure that the household was managed with studied frugality. Otherwise I would have had to spend half my time on this drudgery. While my father had extended all the help from my very early days, I can never forget his saving me from the burden of managing the household. This help was largely responsible for my continued and deepening immersion in Tamil.

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88. 'WHAT USE?'

Teaching in the college and taking lessons during my leisure hours for the visiting students, occupied my time. At that point, one Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár got transfered from Ariyilur to Kumbakonam as munsiff. My good fortune led him to me. Thanks to his friendship a new realm opened in my life. I could learn the amazing expanse of Tamil. Till then I had been drinking in the nectar of Tamil in the form of Prabandams such as *Andháthis*, *Kalambagams*, *Pillai Thamizhs*, *Ulás* and *Kovais* and also Puránás. Now a new vista opened before me. I could savour the great beauty suffused in ancient and respected Tamil classics. I could also dispense this joy to others.

Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár:

Mudaliár hailed from a wealthy, Mittá Zamindár family. Even in his early days he was bright and precocious. He was well-versed in Tamil music and Sanskrit. His reputation surfaced to some extent while he was working in Kumbakonam. Many dignitaries and scholars used to call on him and discuss things. It was a practice of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt to send emissaries to the officials landing in Kumbakonam on transfer, and to invite them to the Mutt for special occasions such as Gurupoojá. On learning about Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár's erudition and eminence, Subramania

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Desikar sent the Superintendent Thambirán of the Mutt and others to call on Mudaliár. Thambirán visited Mudaliár with his retinue and had a lively discussion with him.

As Rámasámi Mudaliár was already in the know of the ancient glory of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt, during his conversation with Thambirán he enquired about its service in the cause of learning: "What is the Mutt doing in the cause of promoting Tamil learning? Who are all the vidwáns there? How many students are studying there?". These were some of his questions. He was told that scholars in Tamil, Sanskrit and Music visited the Mutt often and received honours, that the Head of the Sannidánam was himself a man of considerable learning and that many students are learning Tamil from the Mutt Head and also from the junior monks.

During this conversation Sivasubramania Pillai, a Mutt official who had accompanied Thambirán, informed Mudaliár, "One Sáminátha Iyer who had studied Tamil at the Mutt is working as a Tamil pundit in Kumbakonam government college. " "Really? I have not seen him till now," replied Mudaliár.

Thambirán and others left after their useful exchange of ideas, and briefed Subramania Desikar of all that happened. Desikar immediately sent word to me. "It appears that Mudaliár working as munsiff at Kumbakonam is a good Tamil scholar. I suggest you go and see him."

The First Meeting:

Initially I was not overly inclined to see Mudaliár. In obedience to Desikar's directive, I set out to meet him. It was a Thursday (21.10.1880). I reached his house and saw him. I informed him that I was teaching in the local college and had studied in the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. There was a touch of indifference in his response. 'Possibly his official

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position is behind his attitude. If he is a scholar in Tamil, would he be talking to me like this?' I was wondering.

"Under whom did you study?" He asked.

"I studied under Mahá Vidwán Meenákshisundaram Pillai."

I expected some indication of excitement from him, on hearing Pillaivál's name. Even if he was not inclined to respect me for my job, he could have spoken to me with some regard as I came in Pillaivál's lineage. There was no such warmth. He spoke but little.

'Even after hearing Pillaivál's name, this person shows no enthusiasm. Can he at all be a Tamil enthusiast? Perhaps all his reputation is phoney'. I was inclined to think on those lines.

He continued to riddle me with questions. "What are all the books you've studied?" was the next question. I thought it was a good opportunity to overwhelm him with my reply and rattled off the names of the many books I had studied. "*Kudanthai Andháthi, Maraisai Andháthi, Pugalur Andháthi, Thiruvarangatthu Andháthi, Azhagar Andháthi, Kambar Andháthi, Mullai Andháthi, Meenákshi Ammai Pillai Thamizh, Muthukkumárasámi Pillai Thamizh, Akilánda Náyaki Pillai Thamizh, Sekkizhár Pillai Thamizh, Thirukkovaiyár, Thanjaivánankovai...*" I went on and on. Twenty Andháthis, twenty *Kalambagams*, fifteen *Kovais*, thirty *Pillai Thamizhs*, twenty *Ulás*, *Thoodhus* - I was piling up. There was no trace of emotion on his face.

What Use?

"What is the use in studying all these?" He sharply interjected. I was very disappointed. I thought he was possibly enamoured of English language and that was why he

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was making such an observation. But I would not give up. I started listing the Puránás.

"*Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam, Thirunágai Károna Puránam, Máyura Puránam, Kanda Puránam, Periya Puránam, Kuttrála Puránam...*" He remained totally unmoved.

"*Naidatham, Prabulinga Leelai, Sivagnána Bodham, Sivagnána Siddhiyár Urai...*" My listing continued. No positive response from him. 'Oh no, I had forgotten something very important. I could have brought him round if I had mentioned it first.' With this resolve I told him, "I have studied *Kamba Rámáyanam* from start to end two or three times. I have also studied some Cantos directly under Pillaivál."

Eventually Rámasámi Mudaliár asked me, "Ok, is that all?" My disappointment was profound. 'Such disdain even for the great Kamba Rámáyanam? Such calculated indifference! What more do I tell him?' But, he wouldn't leave me. Had a few more questions.

Ancient Texts:

"Well, I find you have studied all these recent texts. Have you studied any of the ancient works?"

I could not figure out what he was driving at. 'Did he think that I had studied only Pillaivál's compositions? *Kanda Puránam, Periya Puránam, Kamba Rámáyanam*- are these not ancient works? What does he have in mind when he talks of ancient works?' I started thinking.

"Aren't there many ancient works among the texts I have studied?" I asked him.

"Have you studied works which provide the very foundation for all these later works?" He asked. At that point I

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came to realize that there must be some substance in him.

"I don't understand which books you are referring to?"

"Have you studied *Seevaga Chinthámani? Manimekalai? Silappadhikáram?*"

I had not studied any of those books; nor has my teacher. I had not even set my eyes on these books. I continued to remain unfazed. 'Completely dismissing all the reputed texts I have mentioned, why is this person making a big do about two or three unknown books?' I replied him somewhat boldly, "These books are not available. If I could lay my hands on them I am confident of reading them."

Now, Mudaliár straightened up, fixed a gaze on me and asked me, "I'll give you a copy. If I do, will you study it and also teach it?"

I told him with self-assurance. "No doubt at all. I'll sure do it." I felt confident that, armed with my intellect and extensive reading and learning, I would be able to study and learn those texts.

"Ok, I'll keep Chinthámani ready for you. You can study it. Do keep coming often." Mudaliár said. I took leave of him. I mulled over my initial attitude towards him and his words at the point of my leaving. I could realize that he was no ordinary, run-of-the-mill person, but a man of deep knowledge and discernment.

The Second Meeting:

I went to Rámasámi Mudaliár the next Sunday. He received me very warmly. More than meeting him, I was very eager to see the book he had referred to. He gave me his copy of a paper manuscript of Seevaga Chinthámani. "Please read this. Thereafter, shall we commence the les-

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son?" He asked. I agreed. Then he explained to me how he got hold of that text.

How Mudaliár obtained the Chinthámani:

"I was very keen on studying ancient texts such as Chithámani. Not one scholar I had met in the country appears to have read them. Palmleaf manuscripts were also not available. Thinking that some manuscripts may be available in the homes of scholars in the Thirunelveli area, I had mentioned about it to my friend A.Ramachandra Iyer who was working as munsiff in Srivaikundam. He made enquiries here and there, but it was all in vain".

"Once a scholar from a village near Srivaikundam belonging to a family of traditional scholars appeared before him as a witness. My friend came to know that he hailed from a family of scholars and that his forefather had authored many texts. When depositions were all over, that munsiff called that witness and enquired if old manuscripts were available in his house. When the witness said, 'Yes', he requested him to search for a copy of Chinthámani and bring it to him. As he was occupying a powerful position, his effort bore fruit. That person brought a copy of Seevaga Chinthámani. My friend bought it for thirty-five rupees and sent it to me. The book in your hands is a copy made from it on paper."

"Even though I obtained it with so much of difficulty, I could not read it. When I was in college the first part of this text (*Námagal Ilambagam*) had been prescribed as a part of my textbook. An Englishman had printed it. There was more English in it than Tamil. Driven by a desire to study the entire text, I have been enquiring with the scholars wherever I went. All of them stopped with Andháthis, Pillai Thamizh and Puránás. They didn't go beyond that.

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This left me weary."

"This is the great text. It was this epic which showed the way for the poetic excellence of Kamba Rámáyanam. If you could study this text, understand its meaning and take lessons on it, it would do you a lot of good; it would also yield me great pleasure."

I keenly listened to whatever Mudaliár said. When I realized that even Pillaivál, who had great erudition in the entire range of Tamil literature, had not read the text, I had an apprehension if I could study and unravel this text.

I also felt guardedly confident.

'Let it be any Tamil text provided it is not out of line with the traditions of Tamil creative writing. Is it Sanskrit or Telugu for me to learn afresh and get trained? If I aply my mind carefully and study, should any text escape my understanding? Mudaliár had disdainfully questioned the utility of the texts I had already learned, and hailed this book. What is so great in this book? I should sure try and find out.'

"I'll come to you later. I'll study this book and then talk." I took leave of Rámasámi Mudaliár and left in high spirits.

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89. JAIN FRIENDS

I started studying the 'Seevaga Chinthámani' text handed over to me by Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. It also contained commentary by Nachinárkiniyar. All I knew was that it is an epic with one Seevagan as its hero. I knew nothing more about its story and the elements of its greatness. Till then I had been nursing a vague pride that I had substantially known the field of Tamil Poetry. A look at *Chinthámani* which was beyond the range of my earlier knowledge, gave me becoming modesty.

The Research in Chinthámani:

I settled down with the book. The first verse:

'Moová mudalá vulagamoru moondru methath
Thávádha vinban thalaiyáyadhu thanni neidhi
Ovádhu nindra Gunathonnidhich Chelvanenba
Devádhi Deva navansevadi serdhu mandrae.'

(The one deified
By the primary threefold world,
The one embodying eternal bliss,
The fountainhead of treasured virtues -
Unto Him the God of gods
Let us pay obeisance.)

I found the verse to be simple, nothing obscure in meaning. But I found a certain novelty in the invocation verse. I

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did not find the usual obeisance to Vináyaká or Sadagopar. Evidently I couldn't have expected this in a Jain epic. Initially I found it to be a prayer to a common godhead. But I could not figure out the significance of the term '*Moová Mudalá Ulagu*'(The Primary Threefold World).

I started reading the commentary. Initially Nachinárkiniyar had explained in detail the Theory of Epics; then followed his gloss on the lexicon. The chapter on Phonology of *Tholkáppiyam*, with commentaries by Ilampooranár and Nachinarrkiniyar, had already been published in print. It had a chapter on Words, with a commentary by Senávaraiyar. As I had already studied those texts, the notes on Phonology and Words occurring in the commentary were clear to me. In the commentary, the phrase '*Moová mudalá ulagam oru moondrum*' was referred to as 'The Three Worlds with no beginning and end.' Till then I had got used to the concept of the transience of the world. Against this background, this concept of the eternity of the world without beginning or end, was very novel to me. I continued my reading. But I found it difficult and wearisome to read on with only that single copy before me.

Palmleaf copy:

As usual I went to Thiruvávaduthurai that Saturday. I informed Subramania Desikar about my meeting Rámasámi Mudaliár and all that happened since, with evident happiness. "It is so good to get acquainted with such dignitaries of good erudition. You should be very careful when you handle lessons for him. There is one palm manuscript in the Mutt written down by Pillaivál." He brought that manuscript, handed it over to me and gave me leave, "As you have to take lessons to Mudaliár, hereafter you come here only on Saturdays and return to Kumbakonam on Sundays".

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On return to Kumbakonam I started studying Chinthámani by referring to Pillaivál's copy and the one given by Mudaliár. Mudaliár's copy contained only the main text and paraphrase. To begin with, special commentaries were available only for a few verses in the Mudaliár's copy. Pillaivál's copy, however, contained special commentaries for each of the verses. 'Is there any benefit in ignoring the special commentary and concentrating only on the paraphrase? Are these two editions copies of different commentaries?' This doubt occurred to me. On closer scrutiny, I could see that both of them had been drawn from the same commentary. I started wondering as to why there are two different versions.

Unknown Areas:

I started handling a lesson for Rámasámi Mudaliár from the very next day. 'Námagal Ilambagam' was in the prescribed text for B.A Examinations in 1870. Mudaliár was a student then. During the lesson, he referred to the matters he had learnt as a student. While I was teaching, I came across the term 'Kattiyankáran'. I did not understand it as a person's name. I read it as '*Kattiyakkáran*'. At that point Mudaliár interjected: "I have learnt *Námagal Ilambagam*. *Kattiyankáran* is the correct word. It is the name of a minister under Sarchandan. It was he who killed Sarchandan." Then a term 'Govindan' appeared in page 187 of the Seevaga Chinthámani commentary. While it generally refers to Lord Krishná, it was not clear to whom it alludes in Chinthámani. It was not clear to Mudaliár also. There were a few such matters where clarity eluded us. On such occasions, I would candidly say that the matter was not clear to me and that I would like to consult and clarify with appropriate scholars. Mudaliár, who had been used to persons claiming knowledge where it did not exist, appreciated my

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honesty and candour. When we were jointly studying Chinthámani, a few scholars used to come and be around. We spent about five months in this manner.

As Chinthámani was a Jain text, I thought that I could get some light on obscure matters by consulting Jain scholars. With this idea in mind, I asked Rámalinga Pandáram who was taking lessons under me, if there were Jains in the area, and if he knew any Jain scholar. He replied, "There are some Jain houses in the Rámasámi Temple West Street. All of them are wealthy people. Some of them are well read." I had a strong desire to meet them.

Chandranátha Chettiár:

The very next day, at my request, Rámalinga Pandáram took me to the street where Jains lived. He took me to the house of one Chandranátha Chettiár known to him. The entrance to the house was decorated with rice-flour 'kolams'. The lintels were adorned with festoons of mango leaves. We went into the house, thinking that it must be a festive occasion. A number of persons had assembled in the central hall. Rámalinga Pandáram pointed to a dignitary there, introduced him as Chandranátha Chettiár and also introduced me to him.

"The whole place is so well decorated with banana leaves and festoons. Anything special?" I asked him.

"Chinthámani recital was completed today and we are celebrating it."

This surprised me a lot. 'We have come here only to ask about Chinthámani. And he talks of completion of Chinthámani. It appears as if there is a custom of organizing regular recitals of this work.' With this thought in mind I asked him, "Did you people read through the Chinthámani text?"

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"Yes. I was one of the audience. He did the recital," he said and pointed to a person sitting in front. Vedoor village in Tindivanam taluk is his place. He is well-versed in the Jain texts and commentaries, Tamil, Sanskrit and Prakrit. There is none to equal him in this field. Appásámi Náinár is his respected name." It appeared to me that he had come there mainly for my sake.

'We have come here in search of a particular field of knowledge, and we are blessed with meeting experts in that very field. On the top of it, there is a celebration on that very theme. It is all god's grace,' I was really elated.

"How long have they been here?" I asked him.

"This recital has been going on for the past six months."

I felt sad that I had wasted away six months.

That eminent scholar was a picture of modesty and was also very soft-spoken. I mentioned to him that I was also trying to study Chinthámani. "There is a reference to Govindá in the text. Who is that person?" I asked him.

There was a certain casualness in his reply. "He is Vijayai's brother. Vijayai is Sacchandan's wife." I raised a few other doubts. I received very clear answers. I nursed a hope that I had landed an excellent mentor to study Chinthámani. Chandranátha Chettiár too explained some matters. He also elaborated on some stories.

Getting Light:

Since that day Chandranátha Chettiiár became a good friend of mine. I came to know that just as we hold readings of epics like the Rámáyaná and celebrate Rámá's coronation, the Jains too have profound respect for Seevaga Chinthámani, conduct recitals and celebrate the completion

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of the reading. Amongst those who traditionally study and recite Chinthámani, there was a commentary transmitted orally from generation to generation. They recite the text; the commentary was in '*Manipravála*' diction and was also interspersed with a lot of technical jargon pertaining to religious matters. Chandranátha Chettiár would often recite parts of the commentary, much to my delight.

In Nachinárkiniyar's commentary on Chinthámani, there are frequent references to the stanzas from the Jain commentary. Unless a person has mastered the entire text and committed it to memory, it would be difficult to pinpoint where different verses appear. I would point out such portions to Chandranátha Chettiár; he would immediately point to the exact place where it occurs and also recite from memory the related verse. He was a veritable encyclopedia in matters concerning Chinthámani.

Even after the completion of the recital, *Appásámi Náyanár continued his stay in Kumbakonam for some time. Then he left for his place. He visited Kumbakonam off and on. I utilized those occasions to gain clarifications from him on Jain traditions and Jain religious philosophy.

Thanks to my association with Jain friends, I could realize the reason behind the prevalence of two versions of the commentary in the manuscript copies. Nachinárkiniyár wrote the first commentary on Chinthámani. The tradition has it that when he read out his text to Jains they pointed out that some parts were contrary to Jain tradition. So, he declared himself to be a Jain, stayed for some time in a monastery, in a place called Chitrámbur, studied Jain texts

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* *He is the father of Ráo Bahadur A.Chakravarthi Náyanár who had retired as the Principal of Kumbakonam College, and been receiving pension.*

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and Jain traditions there, returned to his place and wrote a revised commentary. The text with special commentaries is evidently the latter version.

I could gain clarity on a number of matters through the Jain oral traditions, matters that had remained opaque by a mere textual analysis; I came to know of the history of Thiruthakka Devar, the author of Chinthámani, only in this manner.

The study of 'Chinthámani' with Rámasámi Mudaliár continued. In different places, he would lose himself in admiration of the aesthetic finesse of the main text and the commentary. In the gloss of the first poem of Govindaiyar Ilambagam, the phrase '*Veeranránizhal*' – the shade of the feet of *Veeran* – was interpreted as 'Samava Saranam', and I did not understand the related significance. I was not inclined to leave it at that. I went to Chandranátha Chettiár and asked him. I came to know that '*Samava Saranam*' refers to a large Jain temple. "It had many parts" said Chettiár and added, "The house of Gunabála Chettiár stands just opposite mine. There is a diagram of Samava Saranam in his house. If you look at it, you would clearly understand what I mean."

'Bhavya Jeevan':

Accordingly I went to his house and discussed the matter with Gunapáda Chettiár. He showed me the diagram on Samava Saranam'. I could see clearly the various parts of Samava Saranam. I realized too that Gunapáda Chettiár was well versed in Jain tradition. His wife was even more knowledgeable in that area.

During that visit to their house, I not only saw the diagram of Samava Saranam, but also enquired about some

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matters related to Jainism. After explaining to me what he knew, he called his wife to deal with other matters more exhaustively. She was the sister of Tharani Chettiár, a renowned expert in matters related to Jainism. I learnt some aspects through her. On the basis of my questions the lady thought that I was knowledgeable in Jain texts and told her husband, "He appears to be a *Bhavya Jeevan**". According to Jain tradition, 'Bhavya Jeevan' refers to a soul ready for benediction. I was as elated then as Nachinárkiniyar gained the consent of Jains and embarked on his commentary on Chinthámani. I felt happy as if that lady Jain scholar had granted me a testimonial that I was qualified to undertake research on Chinthámani.

Samudravijayam Chettiár:

I also got acquainted with Samudravijayam Chettiár, a rich person and the son-in-law of Tharani Chettiár. He also lived in the same street as the other Jain friends. With his help I could access a few Jain texts.

Nachinárkiniyar's Commentary:

As I was in constant touch with the Jains and their literature, the glory of Chinthámani started overwhelming me. I realized that it was the veritable touchstone of all Tamil Classical Poetry. I was fascinated by the majesty of its style and the felicity of diction.

Nachinárkiniyar's commentary opened new vistas of understanding for me. But, I had a bit of grievance against him on two matters. In many places I found the commentary replete with caste references, apparently with an intent to explain the meaning. One word in a context would be

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* *An explanation of this concept can be found in the IV Section of my book 'Nallurai Kovai'.*

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related to another word in a different context many stanzas away, shrouding both references in doubt. I found such references somewhat annoying. In many cases of cross references, the textual source of the quotation was not mentioned; there would be only a causal reference - 'so say others too' – and nothing more. If it is a verse from Chinthámani, I had recourse ot Chandranátha Chettiár. If it was some other text I was left hanging. Many of the references were not from the texts with which I was already familiar. It left me wondering if an anthology of these reference-texts constituted a different and unknown world. I would often get irritated - 'Why couldn't this guy at least mention the name of the work?' This is not to suggest that I had not registered the glory of his commentary in its range and depth. He states the meaning briefly, and expatiates beautifully on the significance of only matters subtle and enigmatic. His diction is felicitious. His knowledge of various related texts was indeed oceanic. In the context of such greatness the two aspects I had perceived as drawbacks simply disappeared.

The Beauty of Chinthámani:

My research into Chinthámani started as a part of my teaching Rámasámi Mudaliár; but, it gradually blossomed into a pleasurable pursuit. Beyond teaching at the college and at my house, I was ever engrossed in the study of Chinthámani. I had heard of the story of Anabáya Cholá monarch getting immersed in a study of *Seevaga Chinthámani* and Sekkizhár stating at that point that it was after all a story constructed by Jains. I could feel the vibration of Chinthámani's enrapturing beauty which had held the Cholá monarch in thrall. What does it matter if it was just a heretical fantasy, as we were told? What we savour are the beauty of words, the depth of meaning and the finesse of Tamil. What bar there can be to study and enjoy such a fine epic?

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My Promise:

We were half way through Chinthámani's '*Gándharvadattai Ilambagam*'. During that period, Mudaliár had resigned his job and moved to Madras with his family to work as a lawyer and embark on a free life. He came to my house before he left. "I'm sure you have now realized the greatness of Chinthámani. You must protect this great epic from neglect and oblivion. You must get some more versions of this text, compare them, arrive at a definitive version and get it published in print. There can be no greater service to Tamil."

"I shall definitely try my utmost to get this done, "I promised him. He took leave of me.

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90. ACQUAINTANCES AND RESEARCH

Kumbakonam was a large town. But, there was no place there where the gentlemen of the town could meet in the evenings and have pleasant exchanges. The college teachers had a desire that there should be a town hall to meet this need. Persons like Principal Gopála Ráo thought of an idea to construct a town hall in honour of the former college principal, Mr.Porter. Sadhu Seshayyer and R.V.Srinivása Iyer got strongly involved in this effort. Many citizens of the town held a meeting and constituted a committee to give shape to this idea. Srinivása Iyer was the secretary of this committee.

The Related Land Deal:

The members of the committee selected a place to construct the town hall. That place by name Lakshmináráyanapuram was a fishermen's settlement. It belonged to the Thiruvidaimarudur Temple, but the ultimate owner was the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. While the members of the committee were exploring ways to obtain the land from the Mutt, Srinivása Iyer apparently exclaimed, "Our college Tamil Pundit is very close to Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. We can settle this deal with his help". He also informed me accordingly.

A doubt arose as to whether the Head of the Ádheenam had the right to sell landed property. Some knowledgeable

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persons opined that it was beyond his powers. A few others suggested a course: "We may buy a property of equal value elsewhere and have a deed of exchange. There should be no objection to this." Based on a decision to pursue this course of action, Srinivása Iyer and a few other dignitaries wanted to proceed to Thiruvávaduthurai, taking me along with them.

On May 8, 1881, Sádhu Sehsayyer, Sundara Ráo, Srinivása Iyer, S.A.Sáminátha Iyer and I set out to Thiruvávaduthurai. We stayed there the next day and discussed the matter with Subramania Desikar. Some of those friends had not visited the Mutt earlier; so, they had not realized the greatness of the Mutt. They were very impressed with the Mutt's administrative structure and the various services undertaken by it. Subramania Desikar extended all courtesies to the visitors. During the conversation, the teachers realized the depth of his erudition. Desikar asked me to read a few parts of the commentary of Sivagnána Bodham and Tholkáppiyam and offered lucid explanation. He also quoted parallel Sanskrit slokás and verses from Vyákaraná, much to the delight of the visitors.

Observing the way I read out the text and the nature of my interaction with Desikar, they expressed their appreciation: "Our pundit reads out the verses so well. He is suave in his manner." As desired by the visitors from Kumbakonam, Desikar arranged for the exchange deal.

While I entertained no special pride in consummating this deal, my esteem among the people of the town increased on the basis that I was mainly instrumental in facilitating this land exchange. Gopála Ráo himself laid the foundation stone for the town hall. Funds were collected from the citizens of the town and the construction work started.

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Farewell for Gopála Ráo:

In 1882 the government transferred Gopála Ráo to Presidency College in Madras. He had worked for a number of years as a teacher in Kumbakonam college, and was highly respected. While the students treated him with evident respect, they also had a special fondness for him. His competence and commitment were mainly responsible for this. Everyone appreciated his single-minded devotion to studies, excellence in examinations and his ability as a teacher and as an educational administrator. When he handled lessons on Shakespearean dramas the students listened to him in rapture.

He excelled in explaining matters sharply and lucidly, duly taking into account the intellectual capacity of his students. His command of the English language was a speciality. He was a keen reader, constantly keeping in touch with the developments in his field.

He was also versed in some Tamil texts. Whatever he read he could internalize; this made his learning purposeful. I had heard from Thyágarása Chettiár about his familiarity with Tamil texts such as *Nannool* and *Kural*; I had also observed it in person. Before Chettiár joined Kumbakonam College, Gopála Ráo had himself handled some Tamil classes. On realizing Chettiár's competence, it was he who got him employed in the college.

Accomplishing one's work with unflagging commitment was an article of faith with him. He was fond of the *Kural* Verse:

'*Arumai yudaithen rasávámai vendum*
Perumai muyarchi tharum'.

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(Despair not
Something is daunting
Hard work yields fruit)

It was his habit to write down this verse in his book as a guiding motto.

I was sad at the departure of someone so much devoted to Tamil. He was also somewhat sorry that he was going to leave Kumbakonam College after so many years of involvement. Kumbakonam citizens learnt with sadness that this distinguished scholar was leaving them.

Teachers and other friends decided to hold a special farewell party for him, and it took place in September 1882. I composed and read out a decad of laudatory stanzas in his honour. While reciting them I could not control my tears. Here are a few of my verses:

'Márádha váimai dhanil manachándruk kothiyalum
Mánbu thannil
Thaerádha mánavagark kinidhu vilanguratheruttum
Seerádha iyalbudaiya Gopála Ráyavannár Sivanu voryár
Peráya avanperumai migachiriyan návondrár
Pesar pátro?'

(True to his conscience pure,
Anchored in truth constant,
Endowed with capacity unmatched
To expound lucidly
To shed light even to dullards,
Anger banished from his sphere -
Can one find an equal
To Gopála Ráyar the mentor?

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Can I, a mere insignificant lad,
Find words adequate
To sing his praise?)

"Manniyanar porutkalvi katravarivarivadinarithu
Maaraa neyam anniyar pál
vinavámai adhinaridhu mánákkark
kaiyan theerthal
panniyavá renadatha ladhinariya dhivaiiyalbál
padaithon anbu
Thunniyavan naiyainigartha Gopála Ráyapperth
Thooyan ammá.'

(Rare to accomplish goal education,
Rarer still, not to have
Residual doubts demanding discussion,
Still rarer, the ability
To resolve students' doubts
With a lucidity uncommon,
Living true to values learnt-
All these ingrained in him
With an ease natural,
Embodying a mother's kindness
- He is Gopála Ráyar').

'Munnádun thiramaidhanil migavalla Duraithanathu
Mudhalvar thondai
Nannádu sándrorai yudaithendral Thanaipudhukka Nádi
kollo
Ennádum pughazhinia Gopála Ráya vannal Inaimik
kongum
Minnádum manimádach Chennai nagar vara seidha
Vidhanthán mannoe'.

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(Is it to re-establish
Thondaimandalam's renown
As the abode of the great, that
Government has moved
Gopála Ráyar
Acclaimed universally
To the shores of Madras,
A city of towering buildings
With stars dancing atop).

After the function was over I went to Gopálá Ráo's house and made a request to him: "I'm not sure who will be your successor and what kind of a person he would be. It would be helpful to me if you could give me a testimonial." Gopála Ráo replied with warmth: "Don't worry about such things. Whoever comes in my place would sure be kind to you. There is no need for me to give you a separate testimonial. You better contact the office and get a copy of my letter of recommendation to the higher authorities recommending your appointment. That would be sufficient." I felt reassured that he had mentioned positive things about me in that letter. Gopála Ráo was succeeded by an Englishman named Stuart.

Research in Chinthámani:

After reaching Chennai, Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár used to write letters to me. He would stress in every letter that I should continue my research into Seevaga Chinthámani. I reassured him that I was pursuing the research. I managed to secure a copy of Bower's printed edition of Námagal Ilambagam. When I informed Thyágarása Chettiár about my continuing study of Chinthámani, he sent through Pattábiraman Pillai a copy of the text in his possession. That version was originally written by Pillaivál. It also contained meaning and commentary.

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I wrote down the entire Chinthámani text in two notebooks and went on studying it. Subramania Desikar got some palm leaf texts from Thirunelveli and handed them over to me. I did a comparative study of the different versions and noted down textual variations. I did the comparison with the help of some of the students who came to study in my house. Some college students would also extend some assistance. Four or five students holding one version of the text each, the comparative study became that much easier. It was neither difficult nor tiring. Day or night, this comparative research continued unabated.

I got letters from Thyágarása Chettiár very often. As there was some hitch in the release of his pension, he requested me to contact the Principal and other colleagues and get the matter resolved early. I spoke to the appropriate people and put in some effort in this direction. His pension order was released only a whole year after his retirement.

Thirukudanthai Puránam:

A few works of Pillaivál had remained unpublished; Thyágarása Chettiár wanted to get all of them published. He had contacted some dignitaries of Kumbakonam and arranged for the publication of *Thirukudanthai Puránam*, initially. After he had moved ot Thiruvánaikkával, he often reminded me about the matter in his letters. I contacted the persons who has promised funding, collected the funds to the extent possible and kept sending it to Chettiár.

He had paid an advance amount to the printing press in Madras owned by Thanjávoor Sadhávadhánam Subramania Iyer. But, the project did not succeed. Subsequently Choolai Somasundara Náyagár of Chennai agreed to publish it, and the copy of the text was sent to him. The press sent the proof for Chettiár's review. As his eyesight was deteriorat-

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ing, he would send it to me for attention. I would review the proof, incorporate necessary corrections and send it back to Madras. It was I who gave the 'print order' to the press. We got only the bare text printed. It had not then occurred to me that the text would be reader-friendly only when accompanied by meaning and commentary.

The Charm of Chinthámani:

I was so engrossed in Chinthámani and its commentary that I had hardly any time to devote to other matters. I revelled in the novelty and aesthetic finesse of the work. I could well understand how much the latter texts were indebted to the epic by adopting its epic tradition. During my weekly visits to Thiruvávaduthurai, I shared with Subramania Desikar the poetic beauties I had savoured in Chinthámani. I also mentioned to him that I could not figure out the other texts referred to in the commentary(ies). "There are many old palm-leaf manuscripts in the Mutt. You may review them and take whatever you consider useful." He gave me permission. I accepted his gesture gratefully.

Namachiváya Desikar:

The Junior Head of the Mutt Namachiváya Desikar was filled with wonderment at the matters related ot Chinthámani. At the same time he was not overly impressed with it. He was apparently haunted by the thought that it was, after all, a Jain religious text. He would greatly admire the interpretive brilliance of Nachinárkiniyar commentary.

He went back to Kallidaikurichi to settle down there. He wrote letters to me from there. He urged me to spend a few days there during holidays. I could however, not fulfill his wish!

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91. MY SECOND PUBLICATION

One day a young man came to me from Thiruvánaikká; he had been sent by Thyágarása Chettiár. Chettiár had written to me that the young man has studied some Tamil texts, that he is eager to study more, and had requested me to arrange for his studying in Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. The young man was five or six years younger to me.

Thirumánoor A.Krishna Iyer:

He belonged to Thirumánoor; Krishna Iyer, his name. He provided me his background; he lived in Thiruchirápalli; having learnt about Chettiár's presence in Thiruvánaikká, had gone there to study under him; Chettiár's inability to handle classes because of his frail health; and that therefore, Chettiár had sent him to me. I tried to test him. He could recite from memory, section after section of Thiruvilaiyádal Puránam. From the very way he recited those verses, I could feel that he was deeply involved in the meaning of those verses. His voice was sweet. His handwriting was neat. He was evidently a devout Saivaite. Bearing in mind all these factors, I thought I could make use of him in future.

Having been impressed with his passion for Tamil learning, I took him to Thiruvávaduthurai and entrusted him to Sri.Subramania Desikar's care. He continued there, regularly studying Tamil texts under Desikar and the then Court Poet Madurai Rámasámi Pillai. During my weekly

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visits I would invariably see him and ascertain the situation. I was delighted to learn about his steady progress.

At that point, there was a vacancy of Tamil pundit at Vellore Mahanthu High School. Krishna Iyer applied for that position. I recommended his candidature to a few suitable people and also wrote some letters. He managed to get that job. He frequently wrote to me. He would mention in those letters that he was not overly interested in the routine of the job and expressed a desire to go back to Thiruvávaduthurai and continue his Tamil learning. He came to Kumbakonam during holidays and offered me assistance in the scrutiny of manuscripts and in other matters.

Namachiváya Desikar Passes Away:

In the beginning of 1883, Namachiváya Desikar, the Junior Mutt Head joined the feet of the Lord. This left the people in the Mutt very sad. As a profound Tamil scholar, he was indeed suitable to head the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt, in a number of ways. Everyone was hoping that, after the passing of a great scholar such as Subramania Desikar, he would sustain the reputation of the Ádheenam by heading it. He was also an excellent administrator. Apart from maintaining many Mutt villages from Kallidaikkurichi, he also managed to acquire new villages for the Mutt. Everyone was hoping that under his leadership, the Mutt would excel in material wealth and also in spiritual learning. Man proposes, God disposes. What can mere mortals do!

On hearing this news, I went to the Mutt and saw Subramania Desikar. As a person of consummate detachment, he showed no signs of overpowering grief. "We always thought of him as a very capable person of deep learning. What to do? This is the will of Lord Namachiváyamoorthy." He expressed his sentiment somewhat briefly. I had

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learnt texts under Namachiváya Desikar. In some of his recent letters, he had been urging me to visit Kallidaikkurichi and spend some time there. But, I could not find the time. This made me doubly sad.

Damodaram Pillai:

Rao Bahadur C.V.Dámodaram Pillai of Jaffna lived in Madras those days. He was involved in publishing ancient texts such as Tholkáppiyam. He had also brought out *Veera Sozhiam*. Subsequently he began publishing Iraiyanár Akapporull in commentary and Thiruththanigai Puránam. On learning about the availability of ancient palm leaf manuscripts at Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt, he made a submission to the Mutt Head to send them to him. Subramania Desikar showed me those letters and directed me to find out if those works were available at the Mutt. Dámodaram Pillai had written that he could not access the latter part of the commentary on the 59th Aphorism of I*raiyanár Akapporull* and requested for a copy of that portion. While searching the Mutt, archives we could locate an old edition of Iraiyanár Agapporull. It contained the commentary of that Aphorism intact. Subramania Desikar immediately sent that copy to Damodaram Pillai.

The First Letter:

I wrote to Damodaram Pillai to inform him that Desikar had sent to him the palmleaf manuscript as he desired and I added, "While studying Thanigai Puránam under Pillaivál, Madurai Rámasámi Pillai had taken notes and prepared a synopsis. You may find it useful." That was my first letter to Damodaram Pillai. He was delighted to receive my letter and sent me a reply. Here is an extract from that letter:

"... I propose to visit Kumbakonam in the next few days. I was wondering how to get a letter of introduction to

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win your friendship. At that point Providence has led you to write to me. I am overwhelmed with pleasure by this development. Within three days of the receipt of your letter, I received the copy of Iraiyanár Akapporull text so graciously sent by His Holiness. I was also delighted to see the latter portion of the commentary of the 59th Aphorism.

I intend to have a brief biography of Srilasree Kachiappa Swámi printed at the beginning of the Thiruthanigai Puránam. I would therefore be very grateful to you if you or Srimad Rámasámi Pillai would kindly write it out and send it to me as soon as possible. I also require kind permission to mention the authorship of whoever would oblige by writing it out and sending it to me.

When I meet you in person I shall give you all the details about these matters.

May our friendship born in the middle of Panguni grow and prosper.

Faithfully,
Your servant,
Madras : 25.3.1883. Ci.Vai. Dámodaram Pillai.

As soon as the two books, *Iraiyanár Akapporull* and *Thanigai Puránam* were published, Damodaram Pillai sent printed copies to me and Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. While he had obtained the notes on Thanigai Puránam from Rámasámi Pillai, for some reason he did not have them published. 'Alas, he had not given due recognition to the excellent notes provided by Pillaivál. He does not seem to know how to make meaningful use of good material', so I thought. Subramania Desikar had the same opinion.

I was happy to learn that Damodaram Pillai was planning to settle down in Kumbakonam itself. As Salem Rá-

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masámi had said, I didn't have anyone to provide me good assistance in my research effort because in the Tamil Land those studying and researching classical texts were becoming rare. But I was a new entrant in the field of research. But I was somehow determined to find things for myself. Against this background, I was delighted that a person interested in publishing ancient Tamil texts was coming to live in Kumbakonam.

Thirukkudandhai Puránam:

Alongwith my research into Chinthámani, I was also involved in work related to publishing Thirukkudanthai Puránam. While comparing the Tamil verses with the Sanskrit original, it was considered necessary to make revisions and corrections in a few places. I informed Chettiár about this matter. He wrote to me that it was our duty to ensure that Pillaivál's name and reputation should not suffer at all. Therefore, whenever corrections were warranted I did them meticulously. While involved in publishing the Puránam, I learnt the technique of correcting proofs in print. I had not learnt the art of making the publication presentable and attractive. Those days it was considered an honour to see one's work in print. *Puránam* was printed and published in the Áni month of Subánu Year(June 1883). Somasundara Náyanár provided a laudatory introduction in verse. The book was published as a joint effort of Thyágarása Chettiár and myself. This was also mentioned in the prefatory verse of Somasundara Náyanár.

'Thiruva runkalai Sáminátapeyar serndha
Poruva rumperu maraiyavan kalaiyunar pulamai
Oruva rumpugazhth Thyágarásap peya ruravon
Iruvarum padhip pithinal ginarilang guravae.
(The Brahmin by name Sáminátha
Of erudition and artistic sensitivity;

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And Thyágarásan
A scholar of esteem great -
May this work
Edited and given to the world
By these two
Shine ever so bright!)

This was the second book published by me. I was profoundly satisfied that I had the honour of publishing a work by Pillaivál. Not only that. I had resolved to publish Seevaga Chinthámani too after a careful comparison of various versions. I was, however, concerned that the project should be accomplished well. Had Pillaivál been alive his erudition and affection would have been a great support to me. Even though he was not around any longer, I found it a good omen that I was plunging into Chinthámani after publishing a Puránam composed by Pillaivál. It so happened that the circumstances had facilitated this. Two works of Pillaivál - *Mayura Puránam* and *Thirunágai Karona Puránam* - had already been printed and published during his lifetime. Kudanthai Puránam also followed the pattern of the two earlier publications. The main text was preceded by prefatory stanzas and quotations from Theváram. The book brought back to me memories of Pillaivál. Subramania Desikar looked at the publication very appreciatively and said that it would be great if the other works of Pillaivál were also published one by one. 'There should be divine grace to bless me with such an opportunity', so I prayed.

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92. RESEARCH IN CHINTHÁMANI

When I was researching into Seevaga Chinthámani, I found many quotations in Nachinárkiniyar commentary. I could not find out the source for those quotations. I could identify only the maxims of Tholkáppiyar. Nachinárkiniyar also refers to some verses from Thirukovaiyár and Thirukkural. Those were known to me. When I read the other references I was totally at a loss _ where the verses came from as also their contextual relevance.

Other Ancient Tamil Texts:

I got drawn to identifying other ancient Tamil texts, not current in Tamil Nadu. While leaving for Madras, Rámasámi Mudaliár had left his copy of Silappadhikáram with me. Later, at my request, he also sent a copy of Manimekalai from Madras.

When I was involved in comparing and researching on different versions of ancient texts, the thought of the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt archives occurred to me. With a view to finding out what texts were available there. I raised the matter with Subramania Desikar during a weekend visit to Thiruvávaduthurai. He told me graciously, "I had already told you. You can review the entire collection and take what ever you want." I began to search among the bundles of palmleaf manuscripts stacked there. They were very old.

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Tended to stick to my hands at the very touch. One bundle had a notation in Kumárasámi Thambirán's hand stating '*Aettuthogai*' (collection of palmleaves) and 'looks like Sangam work'.

When I picked up and looked at it, I realized that the bundle contained original Sangam Works such as Nattrinai. I realized that *Ettutthogai* (Eight Anthologies) had been written as *Aetutthogai* (collection of palmleaves).

Nattrinai, Kurunthogai, Ainkurunooru, Paditruppatthu, Paripádal, Kalithogai, Akanánooru and Puranánooru are the eight anthologies known as *Ettutthogai*. I learnt the names of the eight anthologies from an old verse. That bundle contained a copy of the original text. But '*Kalithogai*' and '*Paripádal*' were not found there.

Apart from the Ettutthogai works, I also laid my hands on a palmleaf manuscript which had belonged to Pillaivál. During his time he used to spread it from time to time in the hot sun. One bundle bore the title '*Porunarátruppadai*'. When I asked him what was the text he merely replied," This is also one '*Átruppadai*' like '*Thirumurugátruppadai*. At that time I was somehow not inclined to find out whatever works were available there.

I located that very palmscript of Pillaivál in the Mutt library. Under the name of *Patthuppáttu* (Ten Idylls) there were ten long poems: *Thirumurugátruppadai, Porunarátruppadai, Sirupánátruppadai, Perumpánátrupdai, Mullaippáttu, Madurai Kánchi, Nedunalvádai, Pattinappálai, Malai padu kadám, Kurinjippáttu*. Among the works of the last Sangam Age Ettutthogai (Eight Anthologies) and Pathuppáttu (Ten Idylls) are important. The name Patthuppáttu and the individual long verses included therein were not known to me at that time.

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I did not look closely at the palmscript entitled Porunarátrup-padai. I could also locate an incomplete palmscript containing eighteen works known as '*Padhinenkeezhkkanakku*'. An old copy of '*Chinthámani*' was also there. I collected all of them and reached Kumbakonam.

Unique Universe:

I realized that Seevaga Chinthámani could not be meaningfully put together and published by researching only on that text and that it could be necessary to study and understand several other ancient texts. I separately noted down the quotations and parallels contained in the commentary on Chinthámani, and scanned them again and again. In this manner I had got to know them all by heart. I found some of these verses in the old palmscripts I had collected. On seeing them I was so elated that I felt like having landed a treasure. I continued studying those palmscripts.

They did not appear easy to understand. It appeared as if they were written in an altogether different language. But I persisted; kept reading them. They contained many verses from the commentaries of Tholkáppiyam. Gradually I came to realize that it was a distinctive universe.

I studied Akanánooru, gave numbers in the ascending order to the verses, compiled difficult words and phrases from the verses, and arranged them in alphabetical order. Then I consulted my alphabetical list to find out whether it included those rare words and phrases contained in the examples Nachinárkkiniyar had indicated in his commentary as , 'so have said others'. I could locate one or two. I would go back to that verse and look at it again. I would make out the meaning of such verses with the help of Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary on Chinthámani. I would get involved in it and read it once, twice or thrice. The new world of

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Sangam Works unfolded before me as a mountain enveloped in mist. While the mist was very much there and the height and girth of the mountain did not emerge in clear outline, the wealth of content of these Sangam poems appeared to me, 'as larger than the Earth, higher than the skies and deeper than the Ocean.' In the Chinthámani commentary there is a statement in the earlier part, 'so they say in *Akam*'. I found that very verse occurring in '*Akanánooru*'

While I continued my research it became clear to me that I should embark on a printed version of Chinthámani after I got a better grasp of several other ancient texts. I kept reading the Chinthámani text again and again. I frequently referred to the other texts and took down notes.

The Thanjavoor Version:

I kept enquiring with people known to me whether other versions of Chinthámani texts were available anywhere. As I encountered doubts in many areas, I thought I would benefit by locating a god version of the text. I wrote letters to many persons. I came to know that there were many ancient palmscripts in the house of Rishabadása Mudaliár, a rich landlord of Thanjávoor. It was then that I started my long journey of chasing old manuscripts; and the search still continues. I went to Thanjávoor and called on Mudaliár, duly taking with me some dignitaries of Thanjávoor already known to me.

He was a Jain. He had many palmscripts related to Jainism. He was also worshipping a copy of Seevaga Chinthámani in his family shrine. When I made the request, he initially refused saying that the text cannot be pulled out of the poojá paraphernalia.

I made a very earnest plea. But, his reaction appeared resolute. "I can give it only to Jains and not to other reli-

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gionists. Such an action would run counter to Jain tradition. You cannot easily read and understand Chinthámani, containing so many esoteric ideas. You should study under an Áchárya, obtain his grace and understand the subtleties. If I give it to a non-Jain like you I would be committing a sacrilege."

I tried to employ all my persuasive skills. I was indeed sad that a classical text containing material that would benefit and enthral the entire Tamil world was being kept under a shroud on the plea that it belonged to only one religion and should be kept away from others' view. 'How many such great works had been kept away from the world and had disappeared, all due to religious bigotry! Great savants had created works to add to the glory of Tamil language; but, there are many who keep them in hiding, belittling themselves and those close to them. When will there be a change of heart and redemption?' I lamented.

A person who had come with me mentioned to Rishabadása Mudaliár that I was working in Kumbakonam College and that I was close to Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. He had hoped that this information could help change Mudaliár's heart and persuade him to hand over the palm-script. Unfortunately it had exactly the opposite effect. He exclaimed, "Really? There is no justification for a person involved with the Saiva Mutt to develop a fascination for a Jain text. They treat Jains like dirt. There is no way I would give him that text." My friend was shocked and blamed himself for this strange turn of events.

I took leave of him and continued my enquiry as to who could help me get the copy of the text from Mudaliár. Eventually I approached Rishabadása Mudaliár again, taking with me a rich Maharáshtrian friend by name Thuk-

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kárám Kolkar. As good luck would have it Mudaliár relented and gave me the text. The copy I received after so much of effort was not particularly great. It contained no special commentary.

Confusing Matters:

Through various such efforts I managed to get twenty three versions of Chinthámani. I started reviewing with the help of those versions. The more I studied, more matters became clearer. But there was no end in sight for the rimless ocean of textual variants. The gentlemen-scribes had led their minds widely wander and cause havoc to the text.

There was no way to determine whether there was a 'kombu' or 'suzhi' in a letter. The consonants were devoid of dots. One could not distinguish between the symbol used for long á and the combination 'ra'. The word '*sarppam*' looked like '*sábam*'; '*sábam*' became '*sarabam*'. There was the word '*saradu*' in one place which for a long time I kept reading as '*sádu*'. I mistook '*taran*' for '*tán*'. One part of the text said, "as the elephant is born a '*nágam*". I was reading, thinking, wondering, rereading. I had heard that elephants were traditionally classified as belonging to forest areas, or riversides, or mountain-slopes: these three kinds. The term '*nágam*' could stand for 'mountain', and the elephants referred to belong probably to hill-slopes. A friend, however, was not sure; he said, "Perhaps in Jaina mythology elephants are born from the wombs of the *Nágás*! Why not?" I could only laugh in reply and said, " It is not clear whether an elephant is born of a serpant (*nágam*) or in hell (*naragam*)."

Nachinárkkiniyar states in his commentary, "as elephant is born in hell it is natural to bow down to it. Those who are defeated in a music competition by Gandharva

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Dhatthá are described like this:

"Isayini livatkuth thoetrum
Yánaiyál veru mennin
Isaivadhon drandru kandeer."

(In Music has she vanquished us
No hope we have
To cope with her with elephants.)

Nachinárkkiniyar had possibly referred to the elephant because those men had no chance of employing elephants in the context of winning it. As the matter was related to Music, I thought that it would make sense if there could be a linkage between Music and Elephant. While I was rolling these matters in my mind, it occurred to me that the text should read not as '*Yánai Nágathuth thotrudhalin*' ('as elephant is born from serpant) or 'sound of music'. But, in many copies, the word was beyond doubt 'nágam' and not '*nádham*'. Only in one manuscript I discovered the word clearly stated as '*nádham*'.

In the same way, I stumbled over the word '*Kurudhi*' (blood) taking it for '*Kundhi*'. In the context I found *Thiruthankumárban punaláttiye Uyirpogindra gnamallikut thánum varundhi panchátsaramágiya mandhiraththai koduththapadiyum.*' "He who bore on his chest Goddess Sri, feeling sorry for the dog as it was about to lose its life in the flood, imported to the five-letter manthra (*panchátcharam*)." At once I had a doubt" 'This is a Jaina book; how has the Saivá five-letter mantra entered this text?' In the original text we read 'Imported nectar to the dog.' In the notes, the word nectar (*amirthu*) was explained as 'the five-letter spell.' I first decided that the word 'amirthu'(nectar) should be interpreted in that context simply as manthiram,

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and that the copyist, being a Saivá had added 'five-letter' to 'manthiram', on his own. As I read I found, in line 946, a reference to 'the nectar composed of five words'. From the commentary pertaining to another passage, it became clear that what was meant was the words used for fivefold obeisance. I asked my Jaina friends for clarification. They at once explained the matter to me quite easily: It was the tradition to denigrate as 'fivefold obeisance' the words used in prostrating in front of the five groups of worthies: the *Arugars*, *Siddhars*, *Ácháryás*, *Upádhiyáyás* and *Sádhus*.'

I was not at all put off by such flounderings and fumblings through a maze of textual versions. On the contrary, I was getting excited by this journey. When I derived some clarity in respect of any citation or concept or a confusing textual fragment, all the earlier hassles would totally disappear. I would plunge into the work with redoubled vigour.

There were many occasions when there was confusion in the use of 'soft' 'R' sound and the hard 'R' sound. On many occasions I could not distinguish between the original text, the commentary and the citation. Many were the instances when I could not find out the stanzas covered by Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary. Far too frequently it was well-nigh impossible to sort out the textual variation between one palmscript and another. Relating the commentary to the original stanza and vice-versa was often found to be a daunting challenge. I was baffled a number of times regarding the logic and the significance of a parallel cited in a commentary. I could not understand some subtle points concerning Jainism found in the text, causing a stalemate in my work. On other occasions, I stood perplexed while trying to sort out some grammatical questions.

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Thanks to god's grace I was able to resolve gradually the confusions, hurdles, stumbling blocks and perplexities which I encountered during my journey through the beautiful garden of Chinthámani. I was gaining confidence that my solemn vow to publish the work would somehow get fulfilled.

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93. THREE KINDS OF GAINS

Thanks to the genuine affection bestowed on me by colleagues and students in the college, I could handle the college work without hassles and with satisfaction. My visits to Thiruvávaduthurai off and on, gave me added enthusiasm. Thyágarása Chettiár and Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár also wrote to me frequently. Their letters nearly equalled the pleasure of meeting them in person and discussing matters with them.

Land Redeemed:

As already stated, my father took care of all matters concerning family and household, leaving me free of these demands. It is difficult to find someone so involved and competent like my father in ensuring family welfare. He managed the finances frugally and even saved money through chit funds. Thanks to his efforts we were able to redeem our ancestral property in the beginning of 1884 by paying a sum of Rs.770. Appá had been nursing a hurt that our ancestral property had been in others' hands over a long period of time but he found no way of redeeming it. God's grace in my landing the job and my father's careful and frugal ways of management resulted in saving and enabled the retrieval of the land. Even the purchase of a new plot of land could not have given him similar satisfaction.

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Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár:

My Chinthámani research was proceeding well. I kept Rámasámi Mudaliár informed of the progress of work. He frequently wrote to me expressing his joy and satisfaction. In a letter he had written on 30th October 1880 he stated: 'I know from your letter that you have studied the entire Chinthámani text once and that several doubts still remain. I believe that when you study it once more most of the doubts would get clarified. I am eager to read Chinthámani again with you; only god's grace should pave the way for it. Even so I continue to nurse a strong hope that this would materialize." His passion for Chinthámani and his affection for me were evident. I developed a desire to go to Madrás and spend some time with Mudaliár.

In the meanwhile I visited Thyágarása Chettiár once. When I told him about my research on Chinthámani he praised me wholeheartedly. He told me from memory some references from *Thirukovaiyár* cited in the commentary, which had been unclear to me. I noted them down. He got through print the 'Pooválur Puránam' and I wrote a laudatory verse for it at his wish.

Mahámaham:

Mahámaham fell on the Másí month of Dháruna Year (March, 1885). Huge crowds thronged Kumbakonam. Thyágarása Chettiár had also come. Subramania Desikar had come from Thiruvávaduthurai with his retinue and stayed at their Mutt in Kumbakonam Pettai Street. Many dignitaries and scholars called on him and had the benefit of enlightened discussions. I was with Desikar during that period. It gave me an opportunity to get to know many eminent persons.

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As a person who had grown under the care of the Mutt, I had a desire to donate some amount to the Mutt as 'dharmá' from my savings. I accomplished the desire during the Mahámaham days. I handed over hundred rupees to Subramania Desikar and requested him to utilize it to meet part of the cost of Maheshwara Poojá at the Mutt. Supremely pleased Desikar told me, "You are a child of the Mutt. There is no need for you to give such donations." I replied him suitably. While leaving for Thiruvávaduthurai at the conclusion of *Mahámaham* festival, Desikar presented my father and my son Kalyánasundaram with a golden jewel called 'Moon-String'.

Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam:

There was a steward of the Mutt by name Subramania Thambirán, who was also in charge of the Mahálinga Swámi temple in Thiruvidaimarudoor. While advising the Head of the Mutt about the improvement he had made in that holy place. He sought permission to revive the Spring Festival which had remained suspended for some time. Desikar granted the permission. Arrangements were on to conduct the festival. In the presence of Desikar, Thambirán told me, "Not many people are aware of the glory of the holy site of Thiruvidaimarudur. While there are old Puránás, there are very few who read and understand. So, if you could prepare a prose version of the glory of this holy site, it can be printed and circulated to interested people. I'll take care of the related expenses." Desikar endorsed the idea. I agreed to write that piece.

There were two Puránás related to Thiruvidaimarudur: One, composed by a scholar named Gnánakkootthar; and another by Kottaiyoor Sri.Sivakkozhundhu.

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Desikar. I took notes from Sivakkozhundhu Desikar's work and wrote a piece on Thiruvidaimarudur. I named it *Sri.Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam*, and described in it the sanctity of the presiding deity, of the shrine and of its waters, and also included therein histories of various worshippers and devotees. I read it out to Subramania Desikar and Subramania Thambirán. Then, as requested by Thambirán, I appended to this work two sets of verses in praise of *Ekanáyaká*, the processional icon, one as a 'lullaby' and another as a 'swing-song'.

When it was completed, Thambirán was considering the best place to get it printed. He had known that Kumbakonam Puránam and Pooválur Puránam had earlier been printed in Madrás. So I suggested that this text could be sent to Madrás and got printed. He responded: "Now the text is ready. The Spring Festival is nearing. It would be nice if the printed book is available by then. Sending the manuscript to Madrás by post, getting it back, sending the corrected version again to Madrás would all take time. It may not be possible to get it ready before the festival. You are now having your vacation. If you don't mind the bother, you could yourself go to Madras and get the whole job completed in person. It might mean some additional cost, but that does not matter. Time is of essence." I found the idea very attractive. I had not visited Madrás till then. I always had a desire to go there and get acquainted with the scholars there. Further, I also wanted to spend some time with Rámasámi Mudaliár and jointly read Chinthámani. I thought Thambirán's offer would help realize all these desires. Naturally enough I agreed to go to Madrás on this assignment.

Journey to Madrás:

On an auspicious day I set out to Madrás along with Chidambaram Sáminátha Iyer and Chidambaram Somasun-

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dara Mudaliár who were then studying under me. Subramania Thambirán sent another person to be of assistance to me. I stayed in Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow.

I entrusted the printing work to Chennai Jeevarakshrámrutha Press, left my two friends there to look after the work, and spent most of the time with Rámasámi Mudaliár. When I briefed him about various matters regarding Seevaga Chinthámani, he was very satisfied. He told me, "You should somehow get this work completed. The publication work can be undertaken here. I'll be happy to extend all help within my means." "It is you who launched me on this project. You should help me complete it," I told him.

Rámasámi Mudaliár's Help:

I stayed in Madrás for more than a fortnight. While I had gone to Madras in connection with the publication of Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam, my real interest lay in meeting and getting acquainted with the scholars there. Rámasámi Mudaliár's help facilitated this.

Rámasámi Mudaliár took me in his coach every afternoon. He took me to places such as Presidency College and Cosmopolitan Club and introduced me to the dignitaries visiting those places. Apart from explaining to me their individual merits he also told them about my scholarship. With Mudaliár's assistance, I got acquainted with Judge Muthusámi Iyer, Sir.V.Bháshyam Iyengár, Srinivása Rághava Iyengár, Pammal Vijayaranga Mudaliár and Raghunátha Ráyar. I met Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár and Thozhuvur Veláyuda Mudaliár in Presidency College. They became good friends of mine. I met Vernacular Superintendent Seshagiri Shástri and Tamil pundit Krishnamáchárivár. I met and had lively discussions with Purushavákkam Ashtávadhánam Sabápathi Mudaliár, Shodásávadhánam Subbaráya Chettiár, Kadhirvel Kaviráyar, Kancheepuram

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Rámasámi Náidu, Komaleeswaranpettai Rájagopála Pillai, Choolai Appan Chettiár, Choolai Somasundara Náyanár and Thirumayilai Shanmugam Pillai. As Ashtávadánam Sabápathi Mudaliár had been a co-student of Meenákshisundaram Pillai, he spoke about his erudition. Shodásávadhánam Subbaráya Chettiár had studied under Pillaivál and dwelt with gusto on the great scholar's glory. The scholars I met referred to many ancient verses. I carefully noted them down. I also shared with them the works I had known.

I also got to see many useful sites of Madrás city such as the museum, the beach, the temples, the bookshops and the university. Meeting and getting to know vidwáns and scholars was a notable gift. I was surprised to find many persons occupying high position being humble and affectionate. As one who had witnessed the pomp and bravado of the petty guys of Kumbakonam getting measly salaries of fifteen or twenty rupees, I was struck by the dignity and simplicity of these exalted men.

The Ádheenam Fame:

One day I entered the Kási Pátti hotel on Mint Street. As soon as I entered some persons warmly greeted me, "Come in, come in. Good to see you". 'What's happening? Why all this effusive welcome? Is there any trick in this!' I had a healthy suspicion. Shawls with golden thread, big scented '*tilak*' on the forehead and their manner of speaking gave them away as musicians. While I was observing them, one of them asked me, "When did you come from Thiruvávaduthurai? Is the Sannidánam keeping well?" I realized from the question that they knew about me.

"I must apologize. I am not able to place you." I told them.

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"We know you well. You used to be by Subramania Desikar's side all the time. Áhá! What an assembly! What music!"

I was moved by the thought that the glory of distant Thiruvávaduthurai has reached Madrás, all because of Subramania Desikar's purity, benevolence, erudition and eminence. Those vidwáns praised the glory of Guru poojá Festival at Thiruvávaduthurai, Desikar rewarding vidwáns in line with their merit, and many other special aspects of the Mutt. They also explained to those around the greatness of Thiruvávaduthurai. "Oh, really! Is there one such place? From what you say that Mutt must be a great centre of Learning!" They were overwhelmed.

Listening to these exchanges I felt extremely happy. I also joined them in singing the glory of Subramania Desikar.

Junior Thambirán:

One day I got a letter from Subramania Desikar. "I understand that the Junior Thambirán is studying under Vidwán Árumuga Thambirán at the Mutt located in Náttupillaiyár Koil street in Madrás. When we had gone to Kumbakonam for the Mahámaham festival this Junior Thambirán was introduced to me by a Kundrakkudi Mutt official by name Ayyá Pillai and Deivasigámani Iyer. We were impressed with him. We were so struck by his answers to our questions in Sanskrit and Tamil. In case he is available, we would like to have him here as Junior Head. If he agrees, please send him to this place."

From the day I landed in Madrás that Junior Thambirán visited me often and exchanged pleasantries with me. As the printing press was close to where he lived, he found it convenient to visit me often. When I conveyed to him

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Subramania Desikar's idea, he happily agreed. I wrote to Subramania Desikar accordingly. He directed to send that Thambirán to Thiruvávaduthurai immediately. Accordingly I sent the Junior Thambirán to Thiruvávaduthurai along with Chidambaram Sáminátha Iyer who had come to Madrás with me.

The printing of Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam was progressing. In the meanwhile Thyágarása Chettiár came to Madrás for eye treatment and stayed in Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow for a few days. Subsequently he arranged for another accommodation with the help of his co-student Subbaráya Chettiár, and moved there. I spent time meeting Chettiár, calling on other scholars and looking after the printing work.

Back From Madrás:

The printing work was completed. I took the printed copies to Thiruvávaduthurai on the Holy Wedding Festival Day, handed them over to Subramania Desikar and briefed him on all that happened in Madrás. On hearing this, he expressed satisfaction and appreciation: "There are three benefits from Sáminátha Iyer's visit to Madrás. One belongs to him. The other two benefits accrue to the Mutt. Getting acquainted with many persons is beneficial to him. Publishing Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam and bringing Junior Thambirán here are beneficial to the Mutt."

The Spring Festival went off splendidly. Copies of Madhyárjuna Mánmiyam were distributed at the appropriate time.

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94. AN INTERVENING CONFUSION

As I was researching constantly, my mind was full of Chinthámani; totally immersed in it. As soon as I woke up in the morning, the first thing I looked into was Chinthámani. After cleaning the teeth and completing my morning rituals I would go through the motions of breakfast, and immediately plunge into Chinthámani. Even the pressure of college timing would not disturb me. The first college-bell would fall on my ears and pull me cruelly from Chinthámani. I would have a hurried meal and leave for college. On some occasions I would even skip the meal. While teaching in the college I would frequently make references to Chinthámani and regale my students. I would get some of them home and involve them in the Chinthámani project by way of comparing different versions and noting down textual variations. The minute I returned home in the afternoon I would pick up Chinthámani. With a copy of Chinthámani text placed on a small writing desk on the thinnai of our house, I would be immersed in Chinthámani research till late into night. Me as Chinthámani's companion and Chinthámani as my companion the research went on, not registering the passage of time.

One of my college colleagues was returning home through my street around twelve at night after a game of cards in a friend's house. He was surprised to find me seated in front of my desk, with the lone lamp keeping vigil

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in a blanket of darkness. "What's this? You are still sitting there! I saw you in the same posture when I passed by a few hours ago. And, you are still frozen in the same posture," he exclaimed. I sent him away after a brief reply.

The Universe of Chinthámani:

In that blessed solitude, Thiruthakka Thevar would lead me wherever his fancy took him. He would show the scenes of Rājamápuram. Would take me inside Satchanda's harem. Would narrate the deeds of Kattiyankāran.

There speaks Jeevagan; there he plays; performs the acts of valour; indulges in amorous revels. *Gándharvadhathai* appears in her glory. A fleeting glimpse of *Gunamálai* too. In the midst of all these scenes, only my body remained in solitude. My mind would be journeying through the universe of Chinthámani and would be savouring the sights and sounds of yonder years. It would be punctuated by thoughts of research; complexities and conclusions would loom in my mind. The vignettes of Seevaga Chinthámani would temporarily fade away. The book and the words would register their presence. The textual variations would daunt. I would be tormented by portions defying clarity. Suddenly a light will dawn. Opaque portion would become lucid. Again the book, the words and this world would disappear from you.

The Acquaintance of Damodaram Pillai:

Meanwhile, Si.Vai. Damodaram Pillai came to Kumbakonam from Madras and set up practice there as a lawyer, just as he had written to me earlier. He was already receiving pension after retiring as a senior official. He used to visit me often and discuss matters concerning many Tamil texts. He had set up his residence in Karuppoor, close to Kumba-

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konam. I also used to visit him often. He informed me that he was publishing many Tamil texts, and also expressed his wish to call on Subramania Desikar. Accordingly I took him to Desikar and introduced him. He had known of the availability of many palmleaf manuscripts at the Mutt and was desirous of using them for his publication work. After his conversation with Desikar, he realized Desikar's erudition and magnanimity.

As desired by him, I introduced Dámodaram Pillai to many dignitaries and lawyers in Kumbakonam. The two of us often discussed matters related to Tamil. He would seek information on many matters and I would reply him appropriately. I came to know through him information concerning many Jaffna scholars. One Nalloor Srikailása Pillai of Jaffna was with him to aid him in research. He appeared to be an accomplished scholar. He moved with me with a lot of warmth.

In one of those conversations, I informed Dámodaram Pillai that Meenákshisundaram Pillai was very involved in Kamba Rámáyanam and had refined many stanzas by resolving textual variations among the various copies of the epic. I also informed him that I had examined the different palmscript versions of Rámáyanam found at the Mutt and taken notes on the best possible version. Thereafter he borrowed my copy of Kamba Rámáyanam with corrections, incorporated those corrections in his copy canto by canto and returned my copy to me.

One Afternoon:

Dámodaram Pillai came to my house one afternoon. After a long spell of conversation he told me, "Sadhásiva Pillai of Chennai involved in publication of *Návalar*'s works had informed me that in fact you had a copy of Chin-

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thámani with special commentary, that he had researched on it and that your copy is a very good one. I'm thinking of publishing Chinthámani. A wealthy landlord of Colombo by name Rámanáthan has undertaken to meet the cost of publication. If you could give me your copy, I'll compare it with mine and get it published."

"After years of hard work I have refined it and put together this copy. I'm thinking now of getting it printed myself. So I'm not inclined to give this copy to you." I politely declined.

Dámodaran: I am very experienced in this field. First of all, lot of funds are required to publish Seevaga Chinthámani. Sitting here in Kumbakonam, it would not be easy for you to get it printed in Madras. If I take up this project I can complete it in three or four months. I can hand over three hundred copies to you before the Pongal festival."

I: I had earlier got a text such as *Kumbakona Puránam* printed in Madras. Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár has also promised necessary assistance in this regard.

Dámo: What big help can he give? Maybe he will give some money. Can he check proof? Can he provide advice on structuring the publication? This epic is not like the Kumbakona Puránam you had earlier published. The approach to the publication would be different it would be necessary to stay in Madras. to pursue the matter diligently and accomplish the task. The Head of the Scottish Press in Madras is a good friend of mine. Whatever I want, he would get it done. Further, your college work would also be a hurdle.

I: My college work would be no obstacle. I would look after this work only during my leisure time. If need be, I would also take leave. I had researched this text laboriously

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reviewing word by word. Entrusting its publication to you -would it not mean a waste of all the labour?

Dámo: Why should it go waste? It would all be put to good use. I would include in my publication all the results of your research. I would also include your name in the publication. If you were to publish it yourself, you may find it embarrassing to laud your own effort.

I: I can write in detail about the excellence of your research work.

Fame not the Objective:

I: Gaining fame and drawing praise from others is not my objective. My concern is that my resolve to get this text published and all the efforts I had put in would go waste.

Dámo: The efforts you have put in thus far is not at all great. But, the real challenge lies in getting it printed. I'm only stressing that you can be saved of all that trouble. I had been in this firld for a while. And have published a few books. So I am well known to the Tamil world. If Chinthámani appears as my publication it would attract special respect. Again, your name also would figure in it.

I: Weren't you also like me in the initial stages? Only after I publish this work we would get to know the respect or lack of it, it evokes.

Why not Rámáyanam?

Dámo: If your desire is to edit and publish a classical text, why don't you publish Kamba Rámáyanam? You have researched on it over a number of years. I found excellent corrections and notations in your copy. Rámáyanam commands greater respect from peôple than any other text. Publishing Rámáyanam would also earn you merit in heaven.

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I: Would that also not involve expenditure?

Dámo: So what? If we plan to publish Rámáyanam, wealthy people would vie with each other to provide financial support. You can publish canto to canto. I will arrange one wealthy patron to support one canto. Leave the publication of Chinthámani to me.

The State of My Mind:

At that point I did not know what to say. My mind was in a whirl. I had once thought that it would be better to gain more knowledge of Tamil and Jain texts, to be better qualified to publish Chinthámani. I would often wonder if I had the necessary capacity to undertake this huge endeavour. Even so, I had a grim determination to commence the publication work, undeterred by such misgivings. I kept silent and my thoughts took a meandering course: 'Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár had promised help to publish this epic. I had given a solemn assurance to him to research on it and get it published, and, am also involved in that effort. And now, this person wants my edited copy, citing his own reasons. Do I get deflected from my chosen course? Every line, every dot and every mark in my handwritten copy is ever so valuable. The line may appear as a mere line to other eyes. But I know its significance, its pointer and its value. How will this man read my notes? How can he identify and discern its significance? Each little mark in my copy has its background, has its message and leads to special meaning. How can a person who has not written these annotations find out what I meant? How many Jain texts I had studied and thereby understood many obstruse aspects! How many Jain friends I have met, cajoled, implored to persuade them to favour me with the needed information and clarification! Should these efforts go down the drain?' I was lost in thought, concern and confusion.

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He would not give up. He persisted in his attempt to persuade me with any and every argument. At that point I told him, "My father has gone out. After he returns home, I would discuss the matter with him and convey my position to you tomorrow morning."

"Please be so. Now give me this copy. I would have a look at it. Thereafter, you may do as you decide. I do hope that the decision will be favourable to me."

I gave him the copy:

I went inside, took the manuscript copy of the Chinthaamani in two parts which I had researched and provided with my elaborate notes, and handed it over to him. His face immediately lit up. His smile was all happiness. "Well, I shall take leave now. Please consult your father and meet me tomorrow with good news," he said and left for his house with my copy of the text in his hand.

A New Turmoil:

Dámodaram Pillai who was till then speaking to me persuasively left immediately on receiving my copy. This left me somewhat disturbed. I would possibly not have had such a reaction if he had continued to speak to me for some more time. After he left,my mind was in a whirl; could not concentrate on anything. I was perturbed if my copy would be safely returned to me. For a long time I was lost in thought and also in deep anguish. At that point, my father returned home. Looking at me, he asked me, "What's the matter? You don't look your normal self. You look out of sorts. What's happening?" Initially I gave an evasive reply. Then I explained to him all that happened - Dámodaram Pillai's visit; the discussion about publishing Chinthámani; and my handing over the copy of the text to him. My father sought to reassure me and told me, "You shouldn't have en-

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trusted your copy to him in a hurry. In any case, there is no need for any undue hurry. You've already informed many persons that you are going to publish Chinthámani. You have been working on it so tirelessly night and day. Only you should publish it. Don't worry. Lord Meenákshisundareswarar would bestow grace on you. Go to Pillai the first thing in the morning, inform him of my advice and bring back your manuscript and take all follow-up actions." I decided that it would be appropriate that I undertake the publication.

I retired to bed after the night meal. Sleep evaded me. I was thinking of the reasons I should offer to Dámodaram Pillai to get back my copy. My mind drew a blank. I waited impatiently for the break of dawn. At daybreak I completed my morning rituals and went to Dámodaram Pillai's house, taking along with me my younger brother Sundaresan. I sat on the thinnai in his house and waited for him to come out. He came out with my Chinthámani manuscript in his hand, and raised a number of doubts. One Yázhpánam Ambigaibága Upádhyáyá was then with him. Looking at the first part of the text, I noticed that he had marked margin in the first twenty pages. He said, "The phrase '*mineruyartta*' in the stanza is explained in its commentary as '*serrai mempatuthina*' (which elevated the male-fish)! What is this? In the edition published by Mr.Bower it reads '*mempattutina*' with elevating. Please explain this." He kept raising doubts: "The commentary says 'The victorious elephant bull which had conquered others before', interpreting thus the line '*venrik kalirai viritáravan venra varum*'. What does it mean exactly?" That too I explained quite clearly.

Then he continued to raise many other doubts. I patiently explained the matter. Ambigaibága Upádhyáyá was observing all this. Then I told Dámodaram Pillai, "The questions you have raised so far are indeed very elementary. The text contains many difficult portions. You don't

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appear to have the means to understand them clearly. So, let us stop this effort. I will be the one to publish this work. How can you publish it without a proper understanding of the meaning and significance of the text?" Still he persisted. "It is my objective not to let this noble work wither away. If we get it published when there is access to funds, the readers would try and find the meaning," he replied. "When the person who publishes the text does not himself understand it, how can we expect the reader to find its meaning? I assure you that by now I have substantially understood the text and its import. So I have decided to publish it myself. If you want to publish it too, you may do so. But I am not going to give up my effort." With these words I took my copy in two parts, handed them over to my younger brother and sent him away, "Please take this home carefully and keep it with you. Also inform Appā. I'll follow you shortly." Without leaving abruptly I continued to spend some more time with Dámodaram Pillai. Ambigaibága Upádhyáyá who had been observing all this, told Dámodaram Pillai, "Ayyá, I have been observing your conversation all this while. It is clear to me that this Iyer has researched and studied this text incisively, and that you haven't read it even once. It is better you leave the work of publication to him. Don't try to embark on it." He told Pillai rather sharply. Pillai remained silent. Thereafter I took leave of both of them and reached home. My father was relieved of his worry on seeing the copy of the Chinthámani text and I kept thinking of the verse about the 'victorious elephant bull' and of 'Ambigaibága Upádhyáyá.'

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95. CHINTHÁMANI: PRINTING BEGINS

I became very eager to complete the printing project of Seevaga Chinthámani as soon as possible. If I had to undertake a complete and exhaustive review of the entire text and then only get it printed, it would take many years. But it is not easy to get all doubts fully resolved before getting it printed. Some of my friends advised me, "If you keep on researching like this, you'll end up spending your whole life on this single text. Before you think that you are ready to publish a thoroughly researched version of the text, someone else would publish it. Taking into account all the work you've done till now, please organize the text suitably. This is not a one-shot work. It can continue. Suitable revisions can, after all, be incorporated in the next edition. With each succeeding edition, the text will also get further and further refined." This reinforced my resolve to launch the publication effort.

Collecting Subscriptions:

'Publication would involve money. What do I do for it?' This worry seized me. Some friends suggested a way out: "You can approach wealthy individuals interested in Tamil, inform them of the proposal to publish Chinthámani, get them to subscribe to it, collect advance payment and start the work." I found this an excellent idea. I put together an appeal and circulated it to many friends.

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During my next visit to Thiruvávaduthurai I informed Sannidhánam about my idea. He warmly welcomed it, affixed the first signature and also gave money for a number of copies. I was also able to obtain endorsement and advance payment form about seventy well-wishers in Kumbakonam. I also went to Thanjávoor and Thiruchiráppalli and obtained help form a number of well-wishers. With Thyágarása Chettiár's help I could get endorsement from half-a-dozen people.

Rámasámi Mudaliár:

Around this time Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár came there on behalf of an Udayárpálayam client. I went and called on him. I informed him about my getting endorsement and advance for Chinthámani publication. Till then he had been urging and encouraging me in this project. But, surprisingly enough, he told me, "You may find this undertaking very daunting. It would involve considerable cost, effort and time. I heard that one Dámodaram Pillai is very keen to get Chinthámani published. He would be able to access required financial support. He also appears to be a well-to-do and influential person. Therefore, why don't you entrust the work to him and be carefree?"

His words shocked me. 'Rámasámi Mudaliár was primarily responsible for my interest in Chinthámani, for my research and my resolve to get it printed. And he is saying all this!'

I could not believe my ears. I could not even dream of such a turn of events. He was fully aware of my research, my efforts and my credentials. I was somewhat sad that he should be advising me to change my course. But there was no way I could agree with him.

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"I have toiled day and night for a few years and undertaken this research. I have no heart to give up this effort. If Dámodaram Pillai wants to publish it, let him. I wouldn't come in his way. Is it fair that I should be asked to stop my work? Haven't I been involved in this work with so much of intensity?" I told him without mincing words.

As he was well and truly interested in me, he would readily feel the intensity of my desire to publish Chinthámani.

"I am not suggesting that you should give up your effort. I was only trying to tell you that he seems to have the strength and the means. Do I not know your ability and credentials? With the kind of fierce involvement on your part, I believe your effort will succeed. I am ever ready to extend all the help within my means." When I heard those words I was relieved to see the old Rámasámi Mudaliár.

Chinthámani occupied my mind totally. I prayed to all gods to bless the success of my endeavour. I made up my mind to spend the summer vacation of 1886 in Madras, and start the work on getting Chinthámani printed. Accordingly I finalized the manuscript for printing.

Trip to Madras:

I set out to Madrás, invoking the grace of god. As Rámasámi Mudaliár was not in Chennai then, I stayed in the house of Shodasávadánam Subbaráya Chettiár. I left my manuscript copies and other related paraphernalia in his house and arranged for my food in a Purushavákam mess. My box contained twenty-four complete as well as incomplete manuscript copies of Chinthámani. As Subbaráya Chettiár had years of experience in the field of publication, I decided to choose the printing press through him.

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Rájagopálāchāriár:

The morning after my arrival in Madras a Vaishnavite gentleman was waiting to see me in Subbaráya Chettiár's house. When he saw me he appeared indifferent. To my query Chettiár told me, "This gentleman is a supervisor in the English section of SPCK Printing Press. Also well-versed in Tamil. Knows many languages. He knows the ins and outs of printing business. He has come to see you."

I was indeed happy. Hoping to get his advice and assistance in the matter of printing. I told him in all humility, "Swāmi, I am delighted to get to know you. I require your advice and blessings. I don't have much experience in the field of printing. So I would request you to guide me in this work." I came to know that he belonged to Therazhundur and his name was Chakravarthi Rájagopálāchāriyár.

"I heard that you've brought with you, manuscript copies of Chinthámani. I've come here only to see you and those manuscripts," he told me.

At once I opened my box and showed him the manuscripts. He looked at them and told me, "I am able to see that you've taken a lot of trouble in collecting and researching these copies. Have you made a comparative study of the different versions? Have you carefully noted down textual variations."

"In a way I have done all that," I replied him modestly. Then, "I have carefully and thoroughly checked some copies. In respect of a few copies I have incorporated corrections wherever I had doubts. It is not clear to me what more I should do. I can assure you that I have done my best to gather and organize these materials. I request you to have it properly printed and published in an attractive manner."

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Then we discussed how to structure the publication.

"The verses, the paraphrases and detailed commentaries are all massed together. This can pose a problem and result in lack of clarity. How do I resolve it?" I asked him. Those days I was under the impression that it was extremely difficult to segregate these three components in a clean and meaningful manner. But his reply left me astonished.

"These three parts can be separated easily. The original verse should be in bold type, and the commentaries in smaller type. We can distinguish the paraphrase and the detailed commentary by putting them in separate paragraphs. It may be difficult to make this distinction in the manuscript form, but this confusion can easily be resolved in the printed version. Don't worry about all that. I'll take care of it." He clarified.

I felt relieved and happy. What an unexpected bonanza! I found him a real godsend!

To my question as to where the printing work could be undertaken he had a ready answer. He said, "There is a printing press called Drávida Rathnákaram in Choolai Avahánam Páppaiyar Street. The owner, T.Govindácháriyár is a friend of mine. A very reliable man. Chettiár too knows him." "What you are saying sounds like a good omen to me. It appears indeed appropriate that the Tamil Chinthámani should be published by a Press the name of which means Ocean of Tamil." I readily expressed my joy and agreement.

Good Omen:

During that period Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár's father Gopálasámi Mudaliár had come to Madras. On learning that I was staying in Subbaráya Chettiár's house, he sent word to me that I could stay in his own bungalow. Accordingly I

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moved to an outer room of his bungalow.

At 3 o' clock in the afternoon I took part of the text and went to the printing press along with Subbaráya Chettiár. Gopálasámi Mudaliár was standing at the portico of the bungalow to see us all. It was then drizzling, and Subbaráya Chettiár hesitated. I said, "It is only a light drizzle. No problem. Let's get going." And we set out. When we were about to leave, a person entered the compound with a large silver salwar covered with a cloth. When we were approaching him he removed the cloth covering the salwar. Oranges and other fruits were heaped on the tray. It was a delightful sight for me. Gopálasámi Mudaliár told us from behind, "Good omen. Your task will be accomplished well. Go forth with no worry in your mind." Then he looked at that person and ordered him to give us two fruits. As the fruit was placed in my hand I felt overwhelmed. 'It's all god's grace'.

The Printing Launched:

On reaching the printing press, I paid obeisance to Lord Vigneshwará and handed over my manuscript to the proprietor of the press. He immediately gave it to the composer. We made a contract to print 500 copies of Royal Octavo at rupees three and a half per 'forme' as printing charges.

The printing work began. Subbaráya Chettiár and Rájagopálácháriyár assisted me, a novice in the field. Rájagopálácháriyár arranged for the use of different types for the title of the book, chapter headings, other captions, the original text and commentaries. There were many quotations in the commentary on the very first stanza. It was not clear to me how to refer to them in the footnote. He filled in the various reference marks for me, like the astrix in appropriate order and also taught me their names. As the press

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was short of several such types, I arranged for the castings and used them in my work.

I informed Subramania Desikar and my father about the help I had been receiving at Madras in connection with the printing work. The printing work progressed well.

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96. PRINTING OF CHINTHÁMANI

While Chinthámani was under print, I used to meet many scholars in Chennai whenever I had spare time. One day I met Ashtávadhánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár at Purushavákkam. As I had already met him he enquired about Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt and Kumbakonam College. I told him, "I have come here to get Seevaga Chinthámani published with commentary." He appeared startled on hearing this. "What do you mean? You are going to publish Chinthámani with commentary? Is it such an easy matter? You are a young man. Of what eminence Chinthámani and its commentary! Accomplishing the task would indeed be very daunting. It would perhaps be wise to give up that effort. Don't venture into this enterprise, without realizing its challenges and difficulties. Don't enter the pond without plunging its depth." He sounded fairly firm. It left me in unpleasant surprise.

Previous Efforts:

"Why should I not publish it? I have studied the text and the commentary many times and researched into it. I have also studied and consulted many other related texts. I am very confident that I can complete this work success-

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fully." I replied him with unconcealed assurance. If I had heard such a comment when I had started my study of Chinthámani while at Kumbakonam, I might have got somewhat apprehensive. When I was speaking to Ashtávadhánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár that day, I was obsessed with the thought of Chinthámani. I had the resoluteness not to renounce that effort in the face of any discouragement.

"I have already embarked on this noble work and also progressed significantly. Instead of blessing my effort why are you attempting to discourage and save me?" I asked him with a trace of irritation.

"You have started the work, yes. So what? Many had attempted this work in the past. They all gave up after a brave start. My teacher Kánchipuram Sabhápathi Mudaliár and I had also wanted to publish this work, and started studying it. Finding it to be very difficult we gave up. *Many years ago one Rev.W.H.Drew planned a publication of Chinthámani and issued an advertisement explaining the project. He too could not complete it. Rev.Pope attempted too, again in vain. Nannool Árumuga Návalar of Jáfna also thought of this idea. In the first edition of '*Thiruchitrambala Kovaiyár*' Chinthámani is referred to as one of the forthcoming publications in an Appendix. For some reason he could not publish it. I understand that your teacher Mahá Vidwán Meenákshisundaram Pillai and Shodasávadhánam Subbaráya Chettiár had also contemplated publishing Chinthámani. Apparently in view of the considerable difficul-

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* "*The printing of Chinthámani was more than once attempted. About twenty years ago, the late Rev.W.H.Drew published a prospectus with a specimen of the work; but his premature death put an end to he great undertaking". H.Bower in his Preface to the edition Námagal Ilambagam.*

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ty involved in this effort, they had not pursued the matter further. This appears to be a jinxed work which had defied many eminent scholars. Against this background I am only expressing my concern and apprehension about your venture." The old man offered an explanation.

But his words left no trace of diffidence in me. "All because a few scholars had given up on this work should I too abandon my effort? That so many had attempted earlier establishes that they were all eager to find this text in print.

Is it not appropriate that someone else feels duty-bound to carry the mantle? Even if my effort gets blocked, it is no sin. Should it get accomplished with the grace of providence, would it not yield joy to Tamil lovers? Subject to my limitations, I have researched on the text and am involved in getting it printed. A few errors here and there is nothing unusual. Future scholars would get them corrected." I replied with evident enthusiasm.

"I have told you what I feel. Now, it is up to you to do as you please." He closed the conversation on a dissatisfied note. And I took leave of him.

Ekkazhuttham:

In the 58th stanza of Námagal Ilambagam, while commenting on the line 'ettaru mayirkuzhá mirunta ponrave' Nachinnárkiniyar has written: "to be interpreted as similar to a large flock of proudly upward-looking peacocks" and adds, as illustration, the words '*Ekkazhuttham*' as others have said. While that poem and that commentary were under print, I could not remember where I had come across the word '*Ekkazhuttham*'. So I just put it down in my diary. Suddenly one day it came to me! I remembered a verse in

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Sirupanjamoolam. Its beginning runs as follows:

"*Kalládhán thánkánum nutpamum kádhirendum*
Iládháthá ekazhuttham cheidhalum
(The perception of an ignoramus,
The stretching of neck of one stone-deaf)

This was the first part of that verse. The word 'Ekkazhuttham' appearing in the verse was not clear to me. I remembered all the quotations appearing in the Chinthámani commentary. When I remembered that part of the verse from Sirupanjamoolam, the note I had made of the word 'Ekkazhuttham' also came to mind. It occurred to me that Sirupanjamoolam line could mean 'a person devoid of both ears looking upwards and stretching his neck'. Immediately I got hold of Sirupanjamoolam text. The verse was very much there. The author was listing instances which provoked laughter from the learned. He first refers to the perception of the ignorant. Then he adds 'Ekkazhuttham' of those deaf in both the ears. According to Nachinárkiniyar, the sound 'ae' in Ekkazhuttham' could mean 'looking upwards'. In such a reading of the word 'Ekkazhuttham' the reading of the particular stanza in Sirupanjamoolam becomes clear. I could also envisage a scene on the following lines:

'Many men and women have assembled to listen to a musical concert. One in the audience was deaf. During the concert he raises his head and moves it. When those who knew him to be deaf watch him, would they not laugh at the thought that this guy was making a pretense of relishing the melody of the music? I could see that this idea is reflected in the Sirupanjamoolam line.'

In 'Needhi Neri Vilakkam' there is a verse:

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"Ekkazhuttha mikkudaiya mákkol,
pagai mugatha vell velán párvayil
Theetum,
Nagaimugatha nangu madhippu (39)

Here Kumaraguruparar refers to the look of a heroic king. In that verse too, the word 'ekkazhuttha' figures.

While researching the chapter of 'Gándharvadhathaiár Ilambagam' the term 'Ekkazhuttham' was found in the fourth verse. Here, Nachinárkkiniyar clearly states that 'Ekkazhuttham' is raising the head. Taking this into account, I made necessary correction in the stanzas from Sirupanjamoolam and *Needhi Neri Vilakkam*. I was elated at this discovery, and also experienced 'Ekkazhuttham'!

Eager to share this happiness of discovery, I looked for Chakravarthi Rájagopálácháriyár and told him, "Today I have discovered the correct variant in a doubtful reading. I am coming to realize that Nachinárkkiniyar is indeed a great benefactor"

"Oh! What have you discovered? A new continent?" He asked me in good humour.

"Even the discovery of a new continent can't give me a fraction of this pleasure," I told him and described the story of Ekkazhuththam. He shared this story with his friends, Choolai appan Chettiár and others. They were all elated and congratulated me. During the process of printing, whenever I shared the joy of discovery of a certain phrase or a line or a reading with other scholars, they would all express their happiness. While Ashtávadhánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár's words had not dampened my enthusiasm, these words of appreciation form the other scholars were a shot in the arm to me. 'I don't know if I can succeed in publishing Chinthámani text with complete lucidity. It is enough if I could

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manage to throw light on some areas which had escaped understanding over a long time. I would treasure this itself as a great gain.' This thought filled me with satisfaction.

The Copy of Mr.Bower:

One day I heard that there was a copy of a commentary on Chinthámanai with one Chinnasámi Pillai, who was a student of Ashtávadhánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár and was serving as a Tamil pundit in Christian College. Apparently this copy was developed after reviewing twenty manuscripts and that it had formerly belonged to Mr.Bower who had published in print 'Námagal Ilambagam'. Choolai Appan Chettiár had told me all this. I took along with me Thillaividanthan Vennpá Puli Velusámi Pillai, a friend of mine and a relative of Chinnasámi Pillai, and called on the Tamil pundit. I told him that I would like to have a look at his copy of Chinthámani and then return it to him.

He went in and came back with a large paper manuscript. It looked huge and impressive. Chinnasámi Pillai told me, "This copy was developed under the active supervision and review by Mr.Bower. I had known him. When he returned home, he handed it over to me as a memento". 'This version incorporates the results of reviewing over twenty versions. It must therefore be a very reliable text and can be very useful to me.' With this thought I took that copy home with a lot of hope.

Immediately I had a quick review of its pages. They abounded in mistakes. It contained all the errors one encountered in uncorrected versions. I had already realized that a thousand uncorrected versions cannot equal one well-tested version. The more the number of uncorrected versions, the more would be the number of useless textual variations causing more confusion. Displaying a large number of textual variations, one could brag that he had looked

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at all those versions. This does not mean that there had been a discerning review and resultant clarity. That manuscript was indeed of no use to me.

Work in Solitude:

I used to correct proofs every day, sitting in the press. Whenever they could spare time, Shodasávadánam Subbaráya Chettiár, Rájagopálachárіár and Velusámi Pillai were assisting me in reading the manuscript and in other related chores. Come evening, I would carry the proofs from the press and reach Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow. In the room allotted to me there I had kept all the necessary accessories for my work. There was a bench in the outside veranda; it also served as my bed. A lantern lamp was hanging above. I corrected the proofs during the nights with the help of that lamp. I would compare the manuscript and the galley proofs, read them very carefully and note down necessary corrections. I would go on and on deep into night till I fell asleep on that very bench. I would suddenly wake up at two or three in the night and plunge into proof-reading till the break of dawn.

There was none to give me company. During those lonely vigils, there was a watch-dog chained at a little distance next to the bungalow. Two *gurkhás* kept all-night watch there. What help could those guys provide me? Maybe they must have been wondering why I was sitting all alone at the dead of night and poring over piles of papers.

Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár:

Meanwhile Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár returned to Madrás from his tour. When he saw the 'formes' of Chinthámani that had been got ready, his joy knew no bounds. He took me with him and introduced me to a few dignitaries. One day we went to the Cosmopolitan Club. Poondi

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Aranganátha Mudaliár was playing billiards there. Even as he was playing, he spoke to me and appreciated a few Tamil stanzas I recited. He also quoted a few verses. On another occasion, I went to his house with the idea of obtaining a subscription from him for Chinthámani. At that point I recited a verse in Kattalai Kalitthurai and handed over to him the subscription booklet.

"Nandhádha vánporu laipula vorkku nayanthalik kum
Chinthámaniyai palaru melidhurach cheidhiduvái
Mandhára thodezhir sandhánam poliru ván porulai
Vandhár kalithidu málranga nádha magipadhiye!

The great lord Ranganátha
Who lavishes bounty aplenty
On those who come unto him,
Like the sandal paste
Of alluring aroma!

May you help ever so many
Access Chinthámani
An epic supreme
Which bestows on scholars
Wealth abundant.

Promising to donate hundred rupees he signed the booklet. And he added, "You leave the booklet with me for a few days. I'll contact a few others and get subscription." He obtained the endorsement from dignitaries such as Pammal Vijayaranga Mudaliár, Rájá Sir Savalai Rámasámi Mudaliár and Choolai Singára Mudaliár.

Back to Kumbakonam:

The summer vacation of 1886 came to an end. Eighteen formes of Chinthámani(144 pages) had been printed. As I had to leave for Kumbakonam, I made necessary ar-

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rangements for the uninterrupted progress of the printing work. "You can see the galley proof here, and please send the pages and further formes to Kumbakonam." I requested Subbaráya Chettiár and Rájagopálácháriár. They were compensated appropriately. On their undertaking to do the needful, I took leave of them. I was desirous of continuing in Madrás and personally supervise the progress of Chinthámani, but the college job was bread and butter to me. So, leaving my heart behind in Madras I boarded the train and left for Kumbakonam.

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97. A HOST OF WORRIES

On my return to Kumbakonam my friends called on me and eagerly enquired about the progress of the publication of Seevaga Chinthámani. I had taken with me the 'formes' already printed. My colleagues in the college appreciated what they saw. Mr.Filderbeck who was the principal of the college, signed off for three copies. While he did not know Tamil he wanted to contribute his mite for a good cause. I showed him the printed formes with me. He found the printing to be presentable and warmly encouraged me to accomplish the work soon.

Desikar's Words:

I went to Thiruvávaduthurai that Saturday and called on Subramania Desiakr. He was extremely delighted. He kept looking at the formes I had taken with me. I explained the way the printing work had been structured. He told a few people who were around, "Has Sáminátha Iyer continued in the Mutt would there have been an opportunity to accomplish such excellent work? Good jewels would shine only in appropriate setting." I interjected and said pilitley, "Is this not an appropriate place? Pillaivál and scholars like Sivagnána Munivar before him had all gained great fame while at this Mutt."

"That's a different matter. Your link with Ádheenam has not snapped. You have now gained another kind of eminence. Now you have gone to Chennai and have begun your next phase of work with great dexterity." Desikar complimented me.

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The proofs frequently came to Kumbakonam. As soon as the college time was over I would sit in my house thinnai and scrupulously correct the proofs. The mail train used to stop at Kumbakonam around midnight. I would complete the corrections in time, take it personally to the rail station and dispatch them myself.

Those Who Helped:

As my house in Bakthapuri Agraháram was very small, I was looking for a relatively larger place to keep the proofs and to scrutinize the proofs along with others. I fixed the upstairs portion of a house, just a few houses away from mine, at a monthly rent of two-and-a-half rupees. Comparing the copies and correcting the proofs were being done there. A few college students and other friends assisted me. One of the students in the college was K.S.Srinivása Iyengár. He was later known as Diwán Bahadur Rájá Sabhá Bhooshana K.R.Srinivása Iyengár, who became famous as a leading light of the Assembly. He was one of the students who helped me in scrutinizing the proofs. There were many college students who manifested affection towards me and rendered such assistance. I requested Subramania Desikar to send a few students from the Mutt to help me in this effort. He sent Vembathu Sundaresa Bhárathi* and Nalla Kutrálam Pillai.** They helped me in comparing the manuscripts and in other ways. One Srinivása Iyengár of Kottaiyoor, who was studying under me also extended help.

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* *Younger brother of Vembathur Âsu Kavi, Siledai Puli Pichu Iyer.*

** *He belonged to the lineage of Ádhi Kumaragurupara Swámigal.*

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Koppai Sabhápathi Pillai:

On one occasion I went as usual to Thiruvávaduthurai and showed the Chinthámani proofs in the printed formes to Subramani Desikar. On that day a man by name *Sabhápathi Pillai from Koppai had come there. He was well-trained in Tamil texts. He also noticed the Chinthámani proofs with his peripheral vision. I had been acquainted with him even earlier. He told me, "I can also do the proof correction for this work. Do permit me." I did not give any specific response, but remained silent. Later, when I was alone with Subramania Desikar he advised me, "Don't entrust this work to all and sundry. This might give room for people to claim credit for all the laborious work you've undertaken. Don't agree to Sabhápathi Pillai's request." I obeyed it.

A Letter in The Hindu:

While I was in Madrás I had the opportunity to get acquainted with G.Subramania Iyer, the Editor of The Hindu and the founder and publisher of Sudesamitran. On learning about my work related to the publication of Chinthámani, he requested me to send a note on the epic and my involvement in its publication and had it published in his newspaper. Further, I made frequent announcements about the progress of the work in Tamil newspapers. It was also published in 'The Hindu' newspaper. Consequently many well-wishers wrote letters to me enquiring about the publication. It appeared as if this news had generated joy amongst lovers of Tamil. Most of them expressed their happiness and appreciation. Some of them even sent laudatory verses for inclusion in the book.

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* *He was also known as Sabhápathi Návalar.*

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A letter appeared in 'The Hindu' during July 1886. The reader had said, "It appears that Sáminátha Iyer is publishing Chinthámani with commentary. The Tamils will accept it only if the commentary is Nachinárkkiniyar's. Sáminátha Iyer's commentary would not be of use." He had used a pseudonym and not revealed his name. Having got used to hearing adulation I got somewhat disturbed by the letter. 'We had made a separate announcement that the publication would contain Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary. This had also been repeated off and on through the newspapers. While so, feigning ignorance of this matter this person has made such a remark. Possibly, he has some evil intention.' So I guessed. This guess was later proved right.

My friends insisted that I should give a fitting reply to that letter. I thought that instead of my registering a response it would be better if somebody else wrote it. I kept Rámasámi Mudaliár informed of this development and my wish. Without any hesitation he wrote a letter to The Hindu and it was published on 5.8.1886. it ran on these lines: "Seevaga Chinthámani is a very ancient epic. Sáminátha Iyer is publishing it only after considerable research and review of a large number of versions. This is being published with Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary. When this book gets published it would be a great asset to Tamil Nadu."

Dámodaram Pillai:

Ci.Vai.Dámodaram Pillai moved from Kumbakonam and assumed responsibility as a judge in Pudukkottai. While there, he published '*Ilakkana Vilakkam*' (Treatise on Grammar) and '*Kalitthogai*'. I realized that he had been hursing a grievance against me ever since I got back my manuscript of *Seevaga Chinthámani*. I also came to know that he had been telling some people that he was going to publish Chin-

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thámani. But, I relentlessly pursued my work on Chinthámani publication, come what may. The more I got involved in this work the more firmly did I ignore and sweep aside the obstacles thrown in my path by a few persons.

Frequently letters were received from friends with words of encouragement and offers of subscription. Hridhayálaya Marudappa Thevar, the zamindár of Ootrumalai, promised to send a sum of hundred rupees.

Another Trip to Madrás:

After the summer vacation I was directing the publication work from Kumbakonam. The work was not progressing as fast as I had earlier expected. Rámasámi Mudaliár frequently wrote to me. On one occasion he had suggested that the work would speed up if I came to Madrás and took charge. So I made arrangements to make another trip to Madrás during the Christmas vacation.

A Rumour:

I left for Madrás towards the end of December. I heard that there was an advertisement in the Jáffná Journal that someone was publishing Chinthámani epic. I enquired with Jáffná Sadhásiva Pillai, who was looking after the publications of Árumuga Návalar in Návalar's Vidhyánupálá Press. He showed me the press cutting and told me, "Sri Návalar's son-in-law Ponnambala Pillai is publishing Seevaga Chinthámani. Twenty formes are apparently ready. Look at this advertisement in the journal." Pointing to the advertisement he exclaimed, "What is the point in two persons publishing the same work?" "So what?" I replied him casually and came away. Since then I had plunged headlong into getting the Chinthámani published fast and in a proper manner. The Christian College Tamil pundit Subbaráyalu Náyagár extended assistance in examining the proof.

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R.V.Srinivása Iyer who had been working in Kumbakonam College, was then in Madrás in a good job in the Madrás Revenue Board Office. I went to his house and stayed with him for a few days. He would express his happiness and encouragement about my publication work. I also used to meet Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár. Not a day passed without my meeting Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár and having lively discussions with him.

The Villagers' Love of Tamil:

One day I was correcting the proofs in the press premises. As I was alone I was reading the proof aloud to myself. As it was Christmas vacation, the street was full of people who had come from the countryside to look around Madrás. I was sitting near a window overlooking the street, engrossed in my work. At that point someone gingerly came up to the window and stood there. I did not notice him. As I was reading aloud, he stood there and kept listening. At some stage I looked up and noticed him. From his rustic looks I could recognize him as a simple peasant. He had come to watch the Christmas sights of the city, but was listening somewhat intently. That Tamil must have attracted him. Seeing him listening to me silently I asked him, "What has brought you here?"

"You are reading something. I've come to listen to it."

"If so why are you standing there? Why don't you please come in?" I told him.

He came in. "Can you read?" I asked him.

"Yes," he replied.

At once I gave him the manuscript and asked him to read. While he was reading I was correcting the book. He was reading the manuscript with keen attention. I was de-

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lighted to find through him the love and affection for Tamil in the villages of Tamil Nádu. On another day a person who had come to Madrás to watch the Christmas fun brought a message from my friend Thanjávoor lawyer K.S.Srinivása Pillai. "I've come to know of a plot to somehow get hold of the formes of the Chinthámani publication by bribing a huge amount to the printing press. Sadhásivam Pillai, the publisher of the journal '*Nágai Neelalochani*' informed me of this plot. You should be extremely careful." This left me very worried. I immediately informed the proprietor of the press, Govindhácháriár. He was a noble man. "Don't worry about this at all. This is the wild rumour being spread by some vicious person. All the workers here are loyal and reliable. Everything that is printed here is kept strictly confidential." He told me reassuringly.

'How many obstacles against an honest work?' I agonized. Invoking the grace of the Almighty I resumed my work. With a fire in People's Park past six one evening, when I was engaged in correcting proofs, Govindácháriár came up to me in a disturbed state. "What Sir, have you heard the news?' he asked.

"What is the matter?" I asked him, somewhat perturbed.

"It is the fire," he said. "All in flames," he exclaimed and stopped. I was aghast. Always steeped in worries about Chinthámani I was filled with consternation if the printed formes of Chinthámani were in danger. "Where? Where?" I enquired in panic.

"Ayyo! The huge pavilion in the Park Fair Ground has caught fire, it seems. Many casualties. The fire is out of control. Many infants, women, children and old people - all have died in the flames!" he was shedding tears. Leaving

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the proofs on the table I rushed to the site of fire with him. What a pitiable sight! How unbearable! I saw many persons in terrible agony – some burnt from head to foot but still alive, with burnt hands, with burnt legs. It was a veritable inferno. Thousands had come from outside the city to watch the Christmas fun. Many got trapped and perished.

My Parents' Worry:

The news spread like wildfire. People from different parts of the State were alarmed and worried as to what happened to their kith and kin. Desparate enquiries were made. Telegrams flew. Letters too. Fearing how worried my mother and father would be, I immediately shot off a reassuring postcard. There was nothing special or alarming in my letter. "….. it is good that you have sent away to our village the cow that had gone dry. I did not go to the Park Fair. I'm fine. Busy with my work." The main thrust of the letter was to tell them that I was safe and well.

In the meanwhile my parents were filled with grief and were helpless. Sadhu Seshayyer went to my house and comforted them. The letters arriving at Kumbakonam during the night would be sorted out and distributed only around eight in the morning. Seshayyer could not wait till then. He went to the Post Office during the night itself and requested the Postmaster to open the mail. When he replied that he couldn't do something outside the normal procedure, Sheshayyer blew his top. "What blessed procedure! Is there no exception during a crisis? Everyone is sleeplessly and anxiously waiting to hear about their near and dear ones and you are talking big about rules and procedures. If you don't open the bundle and reach the letters to the addressees post haste I would complain to the higher authorities." He admonished the Postmaster with a certain severity. As he was

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a very influential person, the Postmaster quietly opened the mail-bundle. Seshayyer picked up my card addressed to my father and showed it to him. Many others also collected the letters addressed to them. At the sight of my post-card life returned to my father.

My Parents' Relief:

At the end of the Christmas vacation, I returned to Kumbakonam from Madrás. While my letter had brought some relief to my parents, they were fully relieved only on seeing me in person. When my mother eagerly asked me, "My child, so you have come back safe!" I could realize from her tone what kind of intense anguish she must have gone through. "It appears that it would take some more time for the book to be completed," I told my father. "Let it take its own sweet time. Doesn't matter. You've come back safe. That's enough for me." It was Appá's way of expressing his affection and concern.

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98. NEW ZEAL

It was Christmas vacation. I was in Madrás in connection with the printing of Chinthámani. One evening, after correcting the proof all by myself, I was slowly strolling in fatigue on the uter veranda of the printing press.

'Krishna Darisanam':

Suddenly I heard the cry of a kite. I looked up. A kite was majestically winging its way above my head. I had the 'darshan' of the kite and then looked down. Thirumánur A.Krishna Iyer was standing in front of me. I was full of speechless wonder. I exclaimed in glee, "Krishna darshan in the earth!" and asked him, "What's the matter? You have come here at the tail end of the vacation."

"I have quit the Vellore Mahanthu School job. I learnt that you are here. So I am here. I want to touch base with you before deciding what to do next."

When I heard those words I felt as if I had landed an unexpected treasure. "Don't worry about the resignation. The help of friends like you would be invaluable in the ongoing work of Chinthámani publication. You can stay on here and look after this work. You should take great care of the books and manuscripts." He agreed to my proposal

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with evident happiness. I entrusted to him some aspects of work related to Chinthámani and returned to Kumbakonam without much worry.

Another Edition:

Subramania Desikar sent me a message from Thiruvávaduthurai through an emissary: "One Ponnaiah of Jáfna has informed me that he was publishing Chinthámani with Nachinárkkiniyár's commentary and has promised to send me a copy on publication. As C.V.Damodaram Pillai had requested for a copy of Chinthámani from the Mutt he had it brought from the Junior Mutt Head at Kallidaikkurichi and sent the copy to Pillai."

My Resolve:

The intensity of my involvement in Chinthámani publication was increasing by the day. I resolved to get it published soon, come what may. Earlier I had been going to Madrás during long vacations. I changed this approach. Even if I got a break of one week I started going to Madrás and look after and monitor the progress of the work.

I went to Madrás in April 1887, during the summer vacation. Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer was performing his duties with great loyalty and competence. I gave him only fifteen rupees per month as compensation. With the limited salary, he lived in Madrás with his family, very frugally. I can never forget the timely and valuable help he was giving me then.

Treasures:

The printing work had been completed till the '*Kemachariyár Ilambagam*,' the sixth Ilambagam of Chinthámani. I kept thinking of how to improve the quality of presentation in respect of the remaining sections. Till then

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I had indicated the sources of some other examples occurring in Nachinárkkiniyár's commentary as footnotes. But I could not locate the sources of all the illustrations. In the hope of finding out such sources, I started reviewing all the old manuscripts in my possession.

One night I was looking at one of the palmscripts. It had no beginning or end. There was an indication that it was '*Porunrátruppadai*'. It was Pillaivál's copy. While I was reading it, I found references to some of the illustrations found in the Chinthámani commentary. 'Oh no! What a pity that I had not carefully looked at this earlier' – I started studying it keenly. *Sirupánátruppadai* followed *Porunarátruppadai* and also, *Perumpánátruppadai*, *Mullaippáttu* and *Madurai Kánchi*. While reading the copy containing also the commentary, I remembered a stray verse starting with '*Murugu Poru Náru*'. Till then I had not realized that that palmscript was '*Patthuppáttu* (Ten Idylls). I had missed it because of my earlier cursory reading. That it was Patthuppáttu dawned on me only then. As I contined reading it, I could identify many illustrations from Chinthámani commentary. My mind was not fully geared to the meaning of those verses. The many illustrations found in the Chinthámani commentary were already etched in my memory. My reading focussed only on identifying the verses in Patthuppáttu which had been quoted in the Chinthámani commentary. My labours did not go in vain. It was eight at night when I started poring over those palmscripts, still working in the press premises. Krishna Iyer was also with me. At nine he started sleeping. As I kept looking at Porunarátruppadai and Mullaippáttu, a new enthusiasm surged within me. I lost count of time. The palmscript copy contained only the long verses up to *Madurai Kánchi*. I looked at that too. It was five in the morning! I was in no

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mood to sleep thereafter; I was savouring my findings one by one.

Krishna Iyer woke up. "What's this? Didn't you at all sleep during night?" he asked.

"Sleep? Do you know how many treasures I landed during this one night?" I was brimming with delight. He could not figure out what I was saying.

"I've discovered 'Pathuppáttu. Moreover I have found out the source of many illustrations found in the Chinthámani commentary," I informed him.

"All Lord Shivá's grace," was all he answered.

Puranānooru:

There was a turning point. From that day I started researching all the palmscripts covering '*Ettuthokai*" (Eight Anthologies) works - leaf by leaf, line by line, word by word. I picked up another text with no beginning and ending leaves. I located the part containing '*Kotrurai Kutrila*' and it filled me with surprise. Nachinárkkiniyar had used the same term in an illustration in his Chinthámani commentary. But, true to his wont, he had simply remarked, 'so say others'. It was evident to me that the work before me was an ancient classic; but the title of the work remained a mystery. The copy contained both the basic text and the commentary, side by side. At the end of that particular verse was visible number '95'.

I had with me a manuscript that contained the plain text of 'Natrinai' and other works. I looked for stanza 95 in each of those works. During that review I came ot know that the palmscript I was looking at was a copy of Puranánooru commentary. Whatever allusions I could find in that palmscript, I noted down separately under the heading

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Puranānooru. I read the other palmscripts too. I continued my careful study of '*Thirukovaiyár*' and '*Pathinenkeezh Kanakku*', and located the sections printed beyond *Kemachariyár* Ilambagam. I clarified the sources of quotations, in the form of footnotes. Apart from indicating the source of the quotation, I included in my notes the entire text of the relevant *Puranánooru* verse. I thought such an approach would underline the glory of those texts and highlight the finesse of their style. I wrote out separately those quotations which I could not include in the footnotes, planning to collect them and incorporate them as an Appendix to the book.

At the end of the vacation, I returned to Kumbakonam in unusually high spirits. I relived my happiness by sharing with my friends the new areas I have discovered. During that period 'Kudaváyil' I. Shanmugam Pillai, a Tamil pundit in Kumbakonam native high school, was learning some texts under me. He was a man of learning full of discernment. He was greatly delighted on hearing these matters.

I slogged day and night, desparate to get the Chinthámani work completed as soon as possible. Chinthámani's final section '*Mutthi Ilambagam*' contained many matters concerning Jaina doctrines. I frequently consulted Vedur Appásámi Nainár and Kumbakonam Chandranátha Chettiár and took down notes. I incorporated them as footnotes in my edition of the text.

My Younger Brother's Wedding:

Chinthámani work was in its final stage of completion. During the Áni month of Sarvajit Year my younger brother Sundaresa Iyer married Mangalámbigai. She was the daughter of a lawyer N.Venkatráma Iyer from Bakthapuri Agraháram of Kumbakonam and the eldest sister of Rao. Bahadur K.V.Krishnasámi Iyer. The Jain friends known to

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me remarked with genuine satisfaction and with a touch of well-meaning humour: "Chinthámani is usually referred to as '*Mana Nool*'(The Book of Marriages). You are engaged in publishing it. As a reward a marriage is being celebrated in your house."

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99. JOYS AND SORROWS

Even though Seevaga Chinthámani was in the press, I continued my search for more palmleaf copies which could be useful for comparative review even at that late stage. Among the palmscripts I got with Subramania Desikar's help, the copies which originated from Thirunelveli had better clarity. When I accompanied him during his journey through Thirunelveli district, I had observed many traditional Tamil scholars calling on him and paying their obeisance. I got acquainted with him. I had heard that hundreds of palmscripts were available with them and that they were guarding them with great care. I had a hope that a visit to those parts could help me land copies of Chinthámani texts. Accordingly I undertook a voyage of discovery.

The Thirunelveli Trip:

I set out to Thirunelveli on an auspicious day. After calling on a few people there, I went to Melagaram on the way to Thirukutrálam. Melagaram is Subramania Desikar's place of birth. His younger brother Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar lived there. A search in his house did not yield any copy of Chinthámani. From there I went to Thirukutrálam, had a darshan of Thirikoodachalapathy, and then proceeded

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to Chenkottai. The descendants of an eminent poet Kavirásа Pandáram, were living there. I went to that house, made friends with them and scoured the palmscripts available in their houses. They contained any number of Prabandams and Puránams. Only a few parts of Chinthámani were available.

Then I went to the nearby villages such as Krishnápuram and Kadayanalloor and visited the houses of scholars there. There too I could land only a few sections of *Chinthámani*. At that time I was given a paper manuscript copy of Chinthámani by Setrur Subramania Kaviráyar who had obtained it from its owner Kumárasámi Pillai, Tamil pundit at Caldwell College, Thirunelveli. It contained the entire text. This was the copy of the version which had belonged to Thoothukudi Veerapándiya Kaviráyar. As it was complete and well-preserved it was of immense use to me.

A Chenkotai Dignitary:

There was a dignitary at Chenkottai who had already signed to subscribe to Chinthámani. When the person who came with me called on him to collect the subscription money, he appears to have told him, "I don't want this man's edition. His work seems to be riddled with mistakes. I am going to buy only a good edition to be published by another scholar." When I came to know of this, I was sad that there were persons in Chenkottai too indulging in such mud-slinging. I immediately returned to Kumbakonam with a resolve, 'Enough of hunting for more palmscripts. I should complete the publication as fast as possible.'

Ashtávadánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár's Compliment:

Thereafter, I used to rush to Madras to attend to the publication work, even if I got two days break from the college. During one such visit I called on Ashtávadánam

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Sabhápathi Mudaliár. Even though he had earlier warned me that publishing Chinthámani was an extremely difficult undertaking, I was interested in seeing him because of his great erudition. He was well-versed in many texts and was also an engaging conversationalist. That day I was discussing many matters with him at considerable length. Our discussion covered many scholars and many Tamil texts. I fluently recalled many stanzas from the *Prabandams* and *Puránams* I had learnt under Pillaivál. From out of the blue, Mudaliár told me, "Ayyá, you are really competent to publish *Chinthámani*." This comment was not related to what we were discussing. During this discussion Mudaliár was possibly noticing and registering my proficiency in Tamil texts. This must have prompted him to change his earlier position. This filled me with surprise and happiness. "Well, how come you have made this remark all of a sudden!" I asked him.

"You may recall that I had earlier told you that you should give up your plan to publish *Chinthámani*. Now I regret having made that remark. I have now realized the range and depth of your Tamil scholarship." He showered me with more praise.

That whole day, I was floating in that joy. But I heard of one matter which came in the way of sustaining that joy.

Mischief Mongers:

I had gone to see Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár on another day. As usual, he fondly enquired about the progress in the Chinthámani project. I briefed him suitably. Then he told me, "I recently met Báskara Sethupathy, the King of Rámnád. He is a great Tamil enthusiast. We got to speak about your proposed 'Chinthámani publication'. Stating that he had already heard of this, he told me that someone

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had mentioned to him that you don't have the competence to undertake such work. Many mischief-makers are ever so ready to cause obstacles to noble undertaking." He was evidently sad about this. On hearing this the joy I experienced on meeting Sabhápathi Mudaliár disappeared without a trace.

Noting my agonized look, Mudaliár tried to enthuse me: "You should not bother to register such matters. Do I not know your resolve to get the work accomplished, come what may? Get on with your work, undettered by such pinpricks. Some of my friends have registered their subscription to the book, in the notebooks you had given me. Persons like Savalai Rámasámi Mudaliár and Pammal Vijayaranga Mudaliár had affixed their signatures most willingly.

Rajagopála Pillai:

On another occasion I met Komaleshwaran Pettai Rajagopála Pillai. He was a Tamil teacher in Madras Presidency College. When I went to meet him, a scholar by name Kánchipuram Rámasámi Náidu was also with him. He was later known as Rámanátha Yogi, who had written commentaries on a number of Tamil texts.

Rajagopála Pillai had published the entire Bhágavatham text. Some parts of the texts were included in the prescribed portion for B.A. examination. I had been acquainted with Bhagavatham even before I became a student of Meenákshisundaram Pillai. I had seen many palmscript versions of Bhágavatham. In the Bhágavatham published by Rájagopála Pillai the author's name was mentioned as ' Âriappa Pulavar.' It contained an invocatory verse on Sadagopar - '*Chindhagathu Keezh Amarndha*'(Seated under a Tamarind tree). I had not seen any of these in the palmleaf copies earlier known to me. So I asked Rajagopála

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Pillai, "In the copies I had earlier seen, there was no mention of the name of the author. They also did not contain this invocatory verse. Where did you find them?" I was agreeably surprised at his reply: "I had not published this work. Someone had printed it under my name. So, I am not responsible for this matter." Later I came to know that one of the Vembathur vidwáns by name Sevvai Chooduvár was the author of *Bhágavatham*, and that the verse starting with '*Chinthagathu*' had been inserted by the printers.

What was intended and What happened:

Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár wanted to help me when I was involved in publishing Chinthámani. With this idea in mind he arranged to get *Námagal Ilambagam* prescribed for the B.A. Examination. He thought that this section alone could be published by me, get many copies sold and come by some financial assistance. As I was then in Kumbakonam I did not know about this then. Shodasávadhánam Subbaráya Reddiár was then involved in printing commentaries on the college and high school text-books. He arranged through his friends to sell these copies to school students. He used to write to Thyágarása Chettiár and also to me on this matter. I also brought those books, got in touch with many schools and arranged for the students to buy those copies. He used to help in my Chinthámani work by examining 'proofs'. On knowing that Námagal Ilambagam had been included by the University as a part of the prescribed text, he got that portion separately printed but without informing me. I felt very sad at this. On knowing about this development, Aranganátha Mudaliár felt very sad that his idea had taken an unsavoury turn. Since then I told Subbaráya Chettiár that he need not read the proofs any longer.

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Those days my friend and the editor of Viveka Chinthámani Sri.V.Sáminátha Iyer, was occasionally writing in the Swadesamitran journal about the work. This prompted many enthusiasts to write to me often and making concerned enquiries.The zamindar of Ootrumalai, Kridhayálaya Marudhappa Thevar who had already signed for subscription, sent me one hundred rupees. One Ráo Bahadur Pa. Ai. Chinnasámi Pillai who was then the Municipal Chairman of Pálaikkádu would often write to me enquiring about the progress of my work.

Dámodaram Pillai's Letters:

C.Vai.Dámodaram Pillai wrote many letters to me from Pudukottai. He was then engaged in publishing Kalithogai with commentary. He wrote to me requesting me to review and correct the proof of that publication.

I wrote politely that as I was fully involved in Chinthámani publication and that I was not in a position to devote attention to any other work. But he persisted. He kept on writing letters to me and sending Kalithogai 'proofs'. Unable to resist his persistent pressure, I occasionally reviewed some parts of the manuscript and suggested whatever corrections occurred to me. He accepted them with pleasure. From that Kalitthogai 'proofs' I could identify some illustrations found in the Chinthámani commentary. He would also write to me off and on about the progress in the publication of '*Ilakkana Vilakkam*' and '*Tholkáppiyam*'. I realized his intense interest in publishing ancient Tamil texts. I would also occasionally refer the status of my work on Chinthámani, in my letters to him.

I Borrow Money:

I could not access adequate funds to meet the printing and paper cost involved in Chinthámani publication.

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While many persons had signed their promise to pay advance amount for Chinthámani copies, only a few had sent in the money. Under these circumstances, whenever I received letters from Madrás asking for payment for printing and paper cost, I found it very difficult to raise necessary funds. I would make the payment in fitful instalments of 150 rupees. I sent letters to the gentlemen who had signed the subscription undertaking. Some of them immediately sent in the money. At one point paper was required to print a few formes. The proprietor of the printing press wrote to me for money. I had no funds with me. I was at a loss. On knowing about my predicament, Dāmodaram Pillai wrote to me stating that I could borrow necessary quantity of paper from a paper-dealer known to him by name Shanmuga Chettiár and that I could pay him the amount in a few months. He also wrote to him to meet my paper requirement. The cost involved one hundred and fifty rupees. As I could not raise sufficient money before the due date, I borrowed and sent the amount. I used to meet such funding shortfalls very frequently. On such occasions I used to ponder despondently 'When would this Chinthámani work get completed...? When would I see the end of such troubles and heartaches...?

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100. CHINTHÁMANI PUBLISHED

The main text and the commentary of Seevaga Chinthámani had substantially been printed. In most of the Tamil books published those days, Prefaces were absent. I felt that a Preface would be found very useful by the readers. I decided to write out a Preface and include it as a part of the book. I started thinking about the various aspects to be incorporated in such a Preface. I thought it would be a good idea that before starting to read the main text, the reader should be in the know of the salient features of the book, the glory of the book and the nature and quality of the commentary. The first thing I did was to prepare an index with the stanzas identified by their opening words, in alphabetical order.

Illustrative Quotations:

As a part of the process of putting together the book, I had indicated as footnotes the sources of different quotations, appearing in the commentary. Then I assembled separately the quotations which had been adequately clarified, and those which lacked such clarity. I decided to append this information in an Appendix to the book.

I also decided to write brief biographical notes on the author of the poem and of the commentator, and include them after the Preface.

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Brief Story Outline:

As Seevaga Chinthámani was not a familiar text in Tamil Nadu, it would be beneficial to a reader if the related story in prose form is included as part of the book. Chinthámani contained more than 3000 stanzas. If I started writing the entire story in prose form it would have become a protracted exercise. So, I decided to restrict my story-telling to a synopsis of Jeevagan's history, duly ensuring that the main storyline is duly preserved. On this basis, I managed to piece and read out the foreword. I read it out to some of my college colleagues and Jain friends. Apart from broadly endorsing my write-up, they also offered some suggestions. I accepted their suggestions wherever appropriate.

The Poet's Biography and Other Matters:

Then came the biographical note on the Poet Thiruthakka Thevar. I could find no useful data in constructing his life. I managed to collect from my Jain friends bits and pieces of information on Thiruthakka Thevar, handed down from generation to generation as a part of their oral tradition, attempted to collect them and somehow put together a hopefully credible biographical note.

Then came the biography of Nachinárkkiniyar. There were two laudatory verses appended to his commentary. Leaning heavily on those verses as authority, I wrote out a biographical note on that great literary benefactor. I mentioned in that note the commentaries he had written on various other texts. While referring to his commentary on 'Patthuppáttu'(Ten Idylls) I referred to the ten poems forming part of Patthuppáttu, their authors, and the main protagonists of the poems. I was of the view that this could be a new information to the Tamil people.

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Then I completed a separate alphabetical glossary of names occurring in Jeevagan's story, under the heading 'List of Appellations.'

Preface:

As I began writing the Preface, I first referred to the eminence of the work and the wealth of data revealed through it: "This Seevaga Chinthámani is the first among the five great epics of Classical Tamil, and was composed by a Jain Saint by name Thiruthakka Thevar. This is one of the authoritative books on which the authors of ancient commentaries on literary and grammatical texts drew a lot for their illustrations. Like the literary works of the great Sangam Poets belonging to the First, Middle and the Last Tamil Sangams, this work also is marked by finesse of language. Like the ancient Válmiki in Sanskrit , this work also embodies in itself remarkable vignettes and descriptions, and therefore is hailed as a great epic. This is also a path-breaker and a model text for many great poets of subsequent eras, to draw inspiration."

Having written this I went over it again and again, improving upon it. As one returning into this new field for the first time, I was seized by a concern that I should gain a good name. Also I intended to keep out everything that might appear incorrect or wrong. So I kept reviewing whatever I wrote and kept incorporating corrections over and over again. As it was an unfamiliar field for me, I was seized with doubt and dread at the end of each sentence. 'Would it be proper to compare this with Válmiki's epic? If Sanskrit scholars come up with criticisms, what do I do...? We call this a model for future epics; if a Jain epic is so described, would we not incur the wrath of Saivites and Vaishnavites?' I was bothered by many such misgivings. 'Let me write

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what, in my judgement, is right and proper. If I realize any mistakes I could suitably correct them later'. After writing briefly about the work I also included in the Preface information concerning my research and matters related to the publishing effort, the urging and encouragement provided by my valued friend Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár, how he gave me a copy of the text and the efforts I had put in to access many other versions of the text.

The Challenges Faced:

I also referred to the difficulties I encountered while examining and comparing different textual versions. Many were the difficulties I had to face during the long journey of determining the correct final text and the related clear meanings of the commentaries. Untiring study and frequent textual comparisons of many ancient and damaged palmscript copies had to be undertaken. Letters and words were often wrongly spelt, multiplied, omitted or reversed ; the commentary itself had to be carefully analysed to distinguish what was the detailed gloss and what a mere paraphrase. To determine where a quotation commenced and where it ended; to recognize how the paraphrase had to be linked to the related text; to identify an error as an error and to decide to discard it; the daunting effort of correctly interpreting the meaning in the middle of a maze of confusion. I had to put in supreme effort to evolve order out of chaos. Even with all these efforts a few portions defied clarity. This was mainly caused by the absence today of the ancient Tamil texts related to Music and Drama referred to in the text.

My Approach:

My mind was bruised when I encountered again and again the large number of textual variations in the different palmscript versions I had to deal with. Whenever I felt that

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a particular version made sense to me and lent meaning to the text. I adopted that version without any change. I was particularly careful not to load Chinthámani text with my own predilections. For me the text to be published was a sacred icon, not to be trifled with. My desire was only to clean it of any blemish, encase it in an armour and to savour its darshan. 'The hand is a little crooked; why not shape it differently? The finger nail is not attractive; why not alter it a wee bit?' - I jealously guarded myself against such an attitude. I believe that every little article in this epic was charged with innate divinity. I was fully conscious of the difference between wiping the blemish and transforming the structure of its limbs. I clarified my position in the following words: "My objective is to ensure that the shape of the ancient Tamil texts and their commentaries should be sustained in their pristine form. Therefore I was resolutely against any whimsical attempt on my part to add, dilute or change elements. In the parent text and commentary, I made a sincere effort to determine the appropriate meaning and accordingly included in my publication. I refrained from being inventive."

I have been steadfastly adhering to this vow to this day. To discern appropriately the meanings embedded in the ancient texts which ruled the Tamil literary realm for many centuries but had been forgotten for a considerable time in the interim, it is necessary to have a good feel of the mileau of those days and the then prevailing literary convention. This would be beyond our grasp after a lapse of many centuries. In due recognition of this factor my approach involved: Biding my time to get clarity in respect of opaque portions of the text; not to dismiss in a hurry as apparent discordance some unexplained variations, but to exercise patience in searching for a proper reconciliation.

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This attitude of deliberate patience was found to be an irritant to many of my well-wishers. But I refused to give up my approach.

Those who helped:

After dealing with the nature of the manuscript copies, I wrote about the patrons who provided financial assistance to me and about those who provided their time and effort to the process of publication. Completed the Preface by detailing the various palmscript copies accessed by me. When I completed writing the Preface I felt the satisfaction of having already pubished Seevaga Chinthámani. I was filled with relief and happiness. Taking all that with me I returned to Madras.

A Copy Of Patthuppáttu:

When I had completed the last portions of the book, handed it over to the printer with my Preface, and corrected the first proofs, I was filled with great joy: 'By the grace of God a good job has been accomplished.' I was also overcome by fatigue. The fatigue that had been kept at bay during my long and tireless days and nights of hard work, suddenly pounced on me as if it had been waiting for me to complete the job. I lay down in a corner of the press building and slept; it was a deep and sweet sleep!

When I woke up someone who was waiting there handed over a palmleaf book and said, "This is for you - Patthuppáttu." I looked at the gentleman. I recognized the donor as Kumárasámi Iyer, a Veera Saivá from Vellore. He was the son-in-law of the great Tamil savant Viságaperumál Iyer. He used to collect palmscripts lying unattended in the houses of old scholars, either for free or with minor payments, mainly by contacting the womenfolk in the house-

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holds, and give them to interested scholars by collecting some compensation. I had already told him that I would compensate him suitably, if he could get me Sangam Works such as Patthuppáttu.

The receipt of Patthuppáttu on completion of work related to Chinthámani appeared to be a good omen to me. 'Mother Tamil had sent this palmscript to me with the directive that I should pursue my service to Tamil', I thought. As desired by him I gave him 50 rupees and took over the palmscript.

'O Mother! You have adorned yourself again with this jewel, Seevaga Chinthámani, through this humble servant of yours. Pray bestow your grace on me that I should lay my hands and refurbish other great Tamil jewels, and offer them at your feet.' This was my fervent prayer to Mother Tamil.

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101. TO THE DELIGHT OF MY FRIENDS

The printing work was completed in respect of the Preface, the synopsis of the story and other supplementary portions of Chinthámani. The printing press did not have facilities for binding. On enquiry I found that one Murugesa Mudaliár was a competent and reliable person in the field; therefore, I decided to request the printers to hand over the printed formes to him for further action. But it was considered proper for me to pay up the dues to the printer before handing over the formes to the binder. But I had no money. I approached my friend and the eminent lawyer Norton's clerk, Vishwanátha Shástri, explained the situation to him and requested for a loan of 300 rupees, duly promising him that I would return the amount with interest in a few weeks. He was good enough to help me with the amount. Immediately I paid up the dues to the printer, who handed over the printed formes to the binder.

Darshan of Perumál:

It was a Saturday, and I visited the Párthasárathi Temple in Thiruvallikkeni and offered worship to Lord. I met a few Sri Vaishnavá scholars there and had useful conversations with them. They complimented me for completing the work related to Chinthámani. One of them was Vai.Mu.Sadagopa Rámánujácháriár. That was my first meeting with him. He

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was then a young man of sixteen. He appeared to be bright and energetic. My friendship with him continued to thrive.

Rámasámi Mudaliár's Prayer:

After the darshan at the temple I went home and slept peacefully.

We printed 500 copies of *Chinthámani*. A hundred of them were wasted as a result of the printer's neglect.

The next day, on Sunday, the binder gave me one bound copy as a specimen. The first thing I did was to take it to Rámasámi Mudaliár. When I showed the copy to him, his joy knew no bounds. "You have accomplished a great job. Now, you must take up *Silappadhikáram* and other works, and get them also published," he urged me.

"I can do that. But everything costs money. Where to go for it? Yesterday I had to borrow 300 rupees from Vishwanátha Shástri to be able to take the copies from the Press." And I described to him in detail the events of the previous day.

Mudaliár was sad to hear the story and told me, "You should contact the gentlemen who had signed the subscription forms; I'm sure they would give the promised amount. You must be able to settle the debt with those amounts."

"But, I have to leave for Kumbakonam tonight itself and be in the college tomorrow morning. How do I approach the subscribers under such time pressure?" I expressed my helplessness.

"In that case I shall approach the friends on your behalf, collect the amounts and hand it over to Shástri. You better meet Aranganátha Mudaliár yourself. He would surely give you the money."

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'He would really be delighted on seeing the book. He would sure extend the promised help.' With this thought in mind I reached Aranganátha Mudaliár's house. He was in his room. It was around 4 in the afternoon. On knowing about my arrival he sent word, "I am very busy with the examination work. I am hard-pressed for time. I'm sorry. I'm not able to see you now. If you come tomorrow morning we can meet and discuss." I had gone there with great hope but had to face an unexpected disappointment. I said to myself, 'It is man's lot to meet misfortunes and good luck at the same time.' I informed Rámasámi Mudaliár of this development and left for Kumbakonam the same night.

In my frantic hurry and running around, I had not eaten the whole day. Even so, turning the pages of the printed copy of Chinthámani ever so frequently I was floating in happiness. Pu.Má.Srinivasáchériár, Tamil pundit in C.S.M. School, met me at the railway station and praised me for accomplishing the printing of Chinthámani. "It is said that Lord Clive, as the representative in India of East Indian Company, had vanquished all opposition, won many new territories and handed them over to the company. After accomplishing this feat, while he was leaving for his homeland all the company officials bade him an effusive farewell. I am reminded of this, when I see you today."

Verses written to Aranganátha Mudaliár:

I arrived at Kumbakonam the next morning. All my friends enquired about the completion of the Chinthámani project. I remembered about Aranganátha Mudaliár, the next day. 'When I went to his house he had asked me to come the next day. But I left for Kumbakonam without seeing him. Would he mistake me?' With this concern in mind I started writing a letter to him, explaining the situation - a

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letter in verse.

Kulatthinár pulavar mechchum gunathinár palanoolá yum
Pulatthinár thisaiala kkum pugazhinár puriaiyil vái mai
Valatthinál ādutthorth thángum vanmaiyál vanmai mikka
Nalatthinár thigazha ranga nádhamá mugilee thorga.'

(Scholars lavish praise on
Your linkage your eminence,
Your erudition your research incisive,
Your fame pervasive,
Your roots in truth noble,
Your beneficence ready and timely.
O Aranganáthá
The cloud bountiful,
Paragon of virtue!
Lend me your ears).

Thiruthakumá munivanarull thelliya Chinthámaniyaith thiruvi ládhen
Varuththamika váynthachchir padhippiththu muditttha peru magizhvai yodhum
Karuththudaiye nágiyandha noolaiyunkaik koduninnaik
Kána vandhum peruththa bákkiyamennaith
Thaduthamaiyál ninaikkánap petrilaenál.

(Braving odds immense
This poor soul
Has accomplished printing
Chinthámani the pure and serene
Composed by poet exalted;
Thirutthakka Devar,

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Come have I
Brimming with joy
With a book unto you.
Oh! Luckless am I
Fate comes in the way
You're not to be found.)

Áyinunin anbudaimai yennalavu magaládhen dāthir kon dae
Tháyinuman bamaindhilagu mirámasá mikkurisil thanpár pinnar
Meiyinanin pálvilamba venniyavae lámavanpál vilambi vandhaen
Neeyiru veergalumor manamudaiyeer enbadhanai ninaindhae manno."

(Yet, resolute my trust
Your kindness would never wane;
Went I to Rámasámi
Of clarity great
Of love befitting a mother,
Kept him informed
What I sought
To convey unto you.
Know do I for sure
The warmth and goodwill
You both lavish on me).

Idhu pozhudhi lenakkindri amaiyádha dhinnadhena iyalbá vorndha
Madhuviravun thodaippuyatthu vallalae velippadaiyá
Vazhanga vennen
Chadhuthunivut riladhánin thirumugamát ranketkum Ásai yerkkuk
Kadhumenavae magizhvumiga ninadhuthiru mugamátram
Kánach cheyyae!"

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(O Patron exalted!
With honeyed garland
Adorning your shoulder mighty,
By instinct you discern
What I need and when.
In the grip of reserve am i
To declare explicitly
What my crying need is.
My prayer unto you -
Eager am I to hear from you
Favour me with a letter
And bathe me in joy soon.)

As I had expected, I received a letter from Aranganátha Mudaliár within a couple of days. It contained seven verses, a short note and a demand draft for 50 rupees. He had mentioned in that note that he had sent 50 rupees to Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. His verses were suffused with true love and concern.

'Andrenaik kána nayandhanai aiya
Amayamov vámaiyál amaiváich
Chendranai ninnaik kandilák kuraiya
Dhennadhae sitrari vudaiyāen
Ondrala palavám pizhaiseyath thagumae
Uththama gunàmorun kudaiyái
Kandrinaik kárák kaliyurak kákkum
Kanivodu kamithanin kadanae."

(That day
Come did you to see me
Return did you calmly
Me unable to see you;
Fault was mine indeed.
One of intellect poor
Commits mistakes

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Not one but manifold.
O You
Of conduct immaculate!
The cow jealously protects
The (erring) calf.
May kind forbearance
Be thy gracious duty.)

He had expressed his sorrow at his inability to meet me when I had gone to his house.

Marundhanasee vagachinthá manikkuraiyai mánnpulavar
Virundhenakkol vagaiyalithái vaeriyambal vaendumadho
Perunthiam poekkuvitthái paerarivinádhavanaipol
Porundheeram petrānaiyae putthagamum petraenae."

(Received have I the book
Seevaga Chinthámani
With commentary lucid,
A feast for the poets
Laced with a touch of medicine.
Darkness you've dispelled,
Sun you are
With intellect blazing.
Becoming the fame you've gained.)

I was filled with joy on reading the letter. I immediately sent a reply of thanks in eight verses. Mudaliár* had mentioned in one of his verses that his stanzas were bereft of meaning (Porull) out of modesty. In my reply I had implied that as his verses were accompanied by money (Porull), they did contain 'Porull' (meaning) and that my verses lacked 'worth' (Porull).

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* *These eight verses are included in my article on Aranganátha Mudaliár Charitram, in my publication Nallur Kovai, Part I*

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'Poruliláp pattenru pagandranai nee navindra suvaip pozhiyum pávaip
Poruliláp pádalgalen pádalporu lulapádal pugazh nin pádal
Poruludanae viraiviyanjal vazhivandha seyalondrae porundhu sándrám
Porulilá venaiyumoru porulákkoll nayasugnap pugazhkkomāne!"
(Enchanting your poem
But you had declared
It is devoid of 'porull'(good ideas) –
No, my verses have no 'porull(good ideas, money).
(You've sent by post
The money (porull)
Proof indeed of 'porull'
O the famed and virtuous!
I'm a poor guy(porullilládha)
Pray take me as a 'porull'(something worthy).

In a week's time the binder from Madras had sent hundred bound copies in a box. Mother took them out, arranged them on a plank decorated with 'kolam', placed a garland of flowers on it, lighted camphor, waved a plateful of water with turmeric powder to ward off evil eyes and placed the book in my hand with her blessings. Father watched it with joyous eyes.

The day saw a downpour. Even so I decided to hand over the books to the Kumbakonam subscribers. I took the first copy to Sādhu Seshaiyyar. He received it and blessed me. Then I visited the other subscribers, handed over the book to them and returned home by noon.

Arrival of Rāmalinga Desikar:

Rámalinga Desikar arrived at 6 0' clock that evening. He was once my student. He managed to earn some money

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by delivering lectures on Saivism in Colombo and Jaffná. He presented me with a few gifts including an elephant made of ebony. I particularly valued that elephant icon. I treasured it as an elephant-faced god providing me protective care.

He briefed me on his journey in Ceylon and the many dignitaries he had met there. "Sri P.Kumārasāmi Mudaliār wants 15 copies of Chinthāmani and promised to sell them soon and remit the money to you. He is a very wealthy man and an aficionado of Tamil." Accordingly I sent the books to Kumārasāmi Mudaliār with a covering letter.

Subramania Desikar's Joy:

The next day I set out to Thiruvāvaduthurai and respectfully handed over a few copies of *Chinthāmani* to Subramania Desikar. He received the books with great joy and glanced the front page, Preface, the history of the poet and also the commentary.

At that point Pon Odhuvār and Mahālingam Pillai of Thiruvāvaduthurai came to pay respect to Desikar. They had spent some time in Jāffna and learnt *Kamba Rāmāyanam* and other texts under Sri. Arumuga Nāvalar's son-in-law Ponnaiáh Pillai. "Ponnaiāh Pillai had written to me some time back that he was planning to publish Chinthāmani. How far has he progressed? Has the work been completed?" Desikar asked.

"There was no word about it there. He had only completed Raghuvamsam. He had requested me to hand over one copy to Sannidānam and another copy with a letter to him" and gave me my copy with a letter. In his letter Ponnaiáh Pillai had expressed his eagerness to see a copy of Chinthāmani and requested me to send one to him.

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On return to Kumbakonam I promptly sent one copy of Chinthāmani to Ponnai ah Pillai along with a letter. I had mentioned in my letter, "No mountain other than *Mantharā* can plumb the depth of '*Pár-kadal*' or 'Ocean of Milk.' Likewise, only you know the depth of Seevaga Chinthāmani. I have somehow managed to get it published. I seek your gracious endorsement."

Subsequently I sent copies of the book to the subscribers with an appropriate letter of thanks. Many of them replied with warm good wishes, some in the form of verses. Many persons also remitted the promised subscription amounts. I thought of personally meeting the subscribers in Thanjāvoor and Thiruchirāppalli to hand over the book.

Srinivāsa Pillai's Praise:

First I went to Thanjāvoor, called on my friend Vakil Srinivāsa Pillai and Kalyānasundara Iyer and handed over the copies. He browsed the history of Nachinārkiniyar, the great commentator and was astonished to read the reference to the works contained in the three anthologies of *Ettuthogai*, *Patthuppāttu* and *Padhinenkeezh - Kanakku*. He exclaimed, "What an amazing ocean of nectar is Tamil! There are so many great works beyond the current range of study of even great savants. You are indeed extraordinarily blessed." I mentioned to him that I was going to meet Chettiār. Srinivāsa Pillai had studied under Thyāgarāsa Chettiār and had immense devotion towards him. "Sure you should. He is the right person to appreciate this treasure and also your work." I took leave of him and set out to Thiruchirāppalli. ◈

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102. NEXT BOOK

When I was involved in the printing of Chinthàmani, the authorities of Srirangam High School informed me that they were looking for a good Tamil pundit and sought my help in locating one. I sent Chidambaram Mu.Sàminàtha Iyer who had studied under me and had spent some time in Thiruvàvaduthurai.

Ma.Vee.Ràmànujàchàriàr *:

He took up the job and performed it to the satisfaction of the school authorities and the students. He also obtained subscription for my Chinthàmani edition. While he moved with everyone with dignity, due to some inconveniences he left the job and moved to another town without informing anyone. An urgent need arose to fill the vacancy. A person from the school approached me for help to find a replacement. I thought Thirumànoor A.Krishna Iyer would be suitable. But, as he was then in Chennai giving me assistance in the Chinthàmani project, I decided to look for some other person as an interim replacement. I met Ma.Vee.Ràmànujàchàriàr who was then studying in Thiruvàvaduthurai, told him that Krishna Iyer would not be able to take up the job for the next few months, and requested him to assume the

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* *He was the one who had worked as a Tamil pundit in Kumbakonam and had published a Tamil translation of Mahàbhàrathà. He was also known as Mahà Mahopàdhyàya Ma.Vee. Ràmànujàchàriàr.*

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responsibility for a few months. Accordingly he took up the job. On the completion of Chinthàmani Project, Krishna Iyer moved to Srirangam and took over from Ràmànujàchàriàr. When I went to meet Thyàgaràsa Chettiàr, Krishna Iyer was teaching in Srirangam.

Thyàgaràsa Chettiàr's Delight:

I left Thanjàvoor for Thiruchiràppalli and reached Uraiyur at 2 O'clock in the night and knocked at the door of Chettiàr's house. On hearing my voice Chettiàr came rushing to the door, opened it, embraced me affectionately and said, "I was lying in bed thinking about you!" Till then he used to address me in respectful plural but at that moment it was the familiar and loving singular. This change in the form of address and his spontaneous embrace pointed to a new level of affection for me. Formality and politeness tend to disappear when mutual affection crosses a certain threshold. "This evening Thiruvàvaduthurai vidwàn Àrumugachàmi and Krishna Iyer had come. They showed me the Chinthàmani book. As I have lost my eyesight I could only feel it with my hand. I found it very weighty. I asked them to read it aloud from the beginning."

"What a wonderful work you've done. The Preface has come out beautifully. For my part I had struggled earlier with '*Nàmagal Ilambagam*'. So I know the value of a book. I am overwhelmed by the intensity and effort in this project. If only Ayyà were around, how delighted would he be. You have brought glory to him, to Thiruvàvaduthurai Mutt which provided you sustenance, to me who happened to get you employment and to yourself." Chettiàr kept lavishing praise on me. We were involved in lively conversation throughout the night. I got ready in the morning to proceed to Thiruchiràppalli and the surrounding areas to hand over

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copies of Chinthàmani to the dignitaries who had offered subscription. Chettiàr wouldn't let me go. "I'll send suitable persons and get the books reached to the subscribers. You should stay on here. Let's continue our conversation." He also made suitable arrangements for the dispatch of the books.

Our conversation continued. And time stood still. I read out portions of Chinthàmani which were particularly enchanting. There were moments when he was moved to tears. I told him of the struggles I had to encounter in identifying the meanings of some words and the sheer joy I experienced when my doubts got clarified. He was listening to me with rapt attention and evident joy.

A Mistake:

Eventually he made one point. "You've mentioned about the help rendered by many persons. I was expecting my name also to figure somewhere. You have not mentioned it. I do have a grievance in this regard."

By nature he was frank and forthright. The grievance of his did not in any way affect his affection towards me or his respect for Seevaga Chinthàmani. That was a different matter. If he found a shortcoming in one area he would not be inclined to find fault in all areas; at the same time, if he found merit in one aspect he would not be blind to the defects elsewhere. He had the ability to perceive both the good and the bad points. And he would not mince words in expressing his opinion.

There was one small reason why I had omitted to mention his name. I realized then that it was a mistake on my part not to have explained it in my introduction. "I am indeed guilty of an error," I admitted.

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When Kambar's main patron Sadayappa Vallal came to attend a function in Kambar's house, he was seated in a corner due to want of space. Observing this a friend chided Kambar."What is this? You've seated him in an obscure corner." The great poet replied. "I would give him the rightful place at the right time." He had indeed heaped praise on his patron in ten places in his epic 'Ràmàyanà. This story came to my mind at that point. I resolved to myself that I should appropriately remedy this mistake. My recompense was later accomplished in three ways. I dedicated the Ainkurunooru publication to Chettiàr. For many years I have been granting a scholarship of forty-eight rupees per year to a Saivite student studying B.A.Tamil in Kumbakonam College. After I settled down in Chennai I named my house as 'Thyàgaràja Vilàsam' to enshrine his memory permanently. I did not have the privilege of taking these steps during his lifetime. To this day, I consider this as one of the major blots in my life.

I spent the whole day with Chettiàr and left for Kumbakonam that night. Salem Ràmasàmi Mudaliàr had written to me that he had collected the amounts due from the subscribers in Chennai and settled my debt to Viswanàtha Shàstri. On learning this, I felt that a huge load was off my chest.

Chinnachàmi Pillai Verse:

On receipt of the copies of Chinthàmani my friends wrote many appreciative letters. Chinnachàmi Pillai, Tamil pundit in Christian College, sent the following congratulatory verse to me on November 12th, 1887.

'Panimathich chadilath thiraikazhal maraváp
pánmaiyoy párulá raetthum

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Thaniperum pulavar kulamani sámi
Nádhaven thálenaip poruláth
Thaniyulang koduthol káppiya nannool
Thandhagath thiyamithu nokken
Ridhalith thanainir kiyatrumá ruladhoe
Ennilen vandhana mallál'.

(The one who forgets not
The feet of the Lord
Residing in the snow-capped
Mount bathed in moonlight,

Sámináthá, the eminent!
Lauded worldwide
As the crest jewel
Among scholars eminent!
Oh! Favoured me,
With texts ancient
Tholkáppiyam and Nannool,
Now this too
The great Agathiyam.
I know not what to do
Save paying homage unto you.)

This verse refers to ancient Tamil grammar classic *Tholkàppiyam*, *Nannool* and also *Agatthiyam* considered the fountainhead of Tholkàppiyam. It uses a clever pun of these three terms and pays encomium to me for having published an ancient epic. I could appreciate the aesthetic finesse in the poem and sent him a reply in verse form with the following last line.

'*Vanpula piradhi yudhavi nee purindhum*
Márula dhoevendra dhennae.

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(*Helped have you with a copy*
Wonder why you said
'Was it different'.)

Kumàrasàmi Mudaliàr's Letter:

As suggested by Ramalinga Desikar, I had sent copies of Chinthàmani to Po.Kumàrasàmi Mudaliàr. On 21.12.1887 he sent me a letter and the payment for the copies. "During my conversation with Ramalinga Desikar he had often referred to your eminence. While savouring those moments I felt unfortunate that I have not had the pleasure of meeting and enjoying discussions with such great scholars. I pay my homage to Seevaga Chinthàmani publication which you had so graciously sent to me. I cannot adequately express my joy. The glory of this work was locked in palm leaf manuscripts and could be accessed only by a few scholars. We are eternally grateful to you for the effort and thought you've put in to make it accessible to persons like me. Let God's grace be with you to help you unearth, review and publish authentic texts of many other ancient classics."

Valaiyàpathi:

On receipt of such letters from many friends, my desire to publish other ancient Tamil texts got considerably reinforced. Along with *Seevaga Chinthàmani* there were four other major works: *Silappadhikàram*, *Manimekalai*, *Valaiyàpathi* and *Kundalakesi*. Among these I had in my possession palm-leaf manuscripts of Silappadhikàram and Manimekalai. I could not get Valaiyàpathi and Kundalakesi. During Pillaivàl's time I had occasion to see the palmleaf manuscripts of Valaiyàpathi in the Thiruvàvaduthurai Mutt library. During those days I had not developed an involvement in such ancient texts. Therefore, I had no occasion to either read that manuscript or to study the texts under a

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teacher. After I developed an interest in researching such old texts, I searched for that manuscript in the Mutt library, but could not find it. I searched all over Tamil Nàdu, but of no avail. It became a part of my life to mourn the death and destruction of so many ancient manuscripts. I was filled with sadness that the manuscript I had once set my eyes on had disappeared beyond my reach. I could only compare my profound sadness with Poet Kambar's eloquent words, 'the intense sadness of a blind person regaining his sight and losing it again.'

What to Publish Next?

I thought of researching on an epic associated with Seevaga Chinthàmani as the next project. I thought that a text with commentary would make my research work less arduous. Silappadhikàram with a commentary by Adiyárkku Nallàr came to my mind.

During that period Ci.Vai.Dàmodaram Pillai and Po.Kumàrasàmi Mudaliàr were frequently writing about the need to get Silappadhikàram published. So, I thought of publishing Silappadhikàram and shared this thought with a few Jain friends. At that point a few Jain friends approached me and said, "You have done us a great favour by publishing a printed version of Chinthàmani which had been available only in palmleaf manuscripts. Likewise, if you could publish *Chooläàmani* also we would extend all necessary assistance." Chandranàtha Chettiàr told me, "In respect of Seevaga Chinthàmani you had put in considerable effort and got to know the various aspects of Jain traditions. Therefore it should be quite easy for you to publish Choolámani." I found their plea reasonable. On reading Chooläàmani I had realized that it was also a great epic like Chinthàmani. So, I started devoting attention on Chooläàmani. I started taking

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down notes. At this point I learnt that Damodaram Pillai was planning to publish Choolàmani. Therefore, I gave up the attempt to bring out a printed version of Choolàmani. I realized that some parts of Silappadhikàram did not quite appeal to me and the commentaries were not available for some parts of the epic, and that I should access and research on other versions of the epic. Based on these considerations I decided not to launch into Silappadhikàram publication straightaway.

Patthuppàttu:

When I was about to complete the publication of Seevaga Chinthàmani, a copy of Paththuppàttu reached me, as if ordained by Mother Tamil. I decided to publish this Sangam text. I invoked the grace of our family deity Thiruvaranga Perumàn, and started studying a copy of *Thirumurugàtruppadai*.

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103. SUBRAMANIA DESIKAR PASSES AWAY

When I decided to publish Pathuthuppáttu (Ten Idylls) I had only two palmleaf manuscripts of that work. One of them was incomplete. While the copy given by Vellore Kumárasámi Iyer was complete, it had a large number of mistakes. Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary, the original text in fragments and other matters were all mixed up. Based on the prose order given by the commentator it was difficult to decide what was the original form of the poems. I thought a reference to a few other versions would help me compare and verify.

Trip to Madras:

Thyágarása Chettiár had written to me to arrange for the publication of the three Prabandams he had authored: Marundu Vennpá Málai, Thiruchitrambala Vennpá Andháthi and Thiruvottriyur Pádhi Thiruvárur Pádhi Andháthi. At that point Sri Subramanya Desikar's eye ailment was getting severe and was causing him a lot of pain. An English ophthalmologist by name Brackman had come from Madras and inspected his eyes. He privately told the chief steward of the Mutt that Desikar had grown extremely weak and it would be better to make appropriate arrangements at the Mutt without any delay. Arunáchala Thambirán who had been sent for from Madrás and was studying at the

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Mutt was referred to by everyone as the Little Prospective Head, as he had already been selected the monastery's Junior Head. Subramania Desikar wanted to anoint him as the Junior Head and directed that an auspicious date be fixed and invitations get readied. He directed me to proceed to Madrás and get the invitations printed. As it was Christmas vacation time I readily agreed to proceed to Madrás. I also thought that a visit to Madrás would be helpful in getting Thyágarása Chettiár's works printed and also in following up my Paththuppáttu project.

Desikar set an auspicious day for me to leave for Madrás. I was haunted by a fearful premonition. I was very upset about his declining health. I took leave of him and started leaving; for some reason I returned, saw him again and took leave of him for the second time and then left.

Rájagopálácháriár's Help:

I stayed in Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow in Madrás and arranged for the printing of Thyágarása Chettiár's Prabandams and the invitations for the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. I had carried with me the copies of Patthuppáttu manuscript. I showed the copy of the original text, all mixed up, to my friend Therazhundur Rájagopálácháriár and told him, "In this copy we don't find the basic texts clearly. It is all mixed up in bits and pieces with the commentary. There are only small parts with related commentary. Even these are not in proper order."

"Let us first write down separately the available parts of the original text. We may try to impart some order after comparing with other sources" said he. I realized that this simple idea had not occurred to me earlier. I handed over 'Mullaippáttu' to him. He wrote down several such parts and showed them to me. I told him that I would follow this

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lead and expressed my thankfulness to him. While I had gained experience at a later stage in wrestling with palmleaf manuscripts braving grave odds, the suggestion given by him at that point was of great help to me.

I found it pleasurable to spend time with Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. I met Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár and informed him that I had commenced research on'Patthuppáttu'. He was delighted to hear it.

On receipt of the invitations for the Mutt Junior Head function I sent them by post to Thiruvávaduthurai. The printing of Thyágarása Chettiár's Prabandam was also progressing well.

Sad News:

At eight O' clock one morning I was talking to friends in Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow.

At that point I received a letter; looked at it; with tears flowing from my eyes I sat totally stunned. Ponnusámi Chettiár, the writer in Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt had written, "At 4 0'clock in the evening (7.1.1888) Mahá Sannidánam has reached Lord's Abode. The anointed person was installed as Junior Head at noon."

My heart was overflowing with grief. When I was left forlorn at the demise of Pillaivál I was at a loss as to who would be my support. At that point the great patron Subramania Desikar extended his hand of help and was a pillar of support. What a play of fate that I could not be by his side when he breathed his last. I sent a card to Thiruvávaduthurai straightaway indicating that I was leaving that night. As a footnote, I appended a line from Kamba Rámáyanam (*Áranya Kándam – Jadáyu* lament, line 21) 'Thou has left and forsaken the poor, the righteous rule and me too.' I then

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forgot this world. I had a desperate urge to leave for Thiruvávaduthurai that very minute.

Rámasámi Mudaliár was very sad on hearing the news. He consoled me. He recalled the many great qualities of Desikar. I was overcome by grief. I took leave of him and made preparations for my journey.

Elegies:

I stood transfixed; felt blank; was in no mood to touch any book. I felt as if the blood flow had stopped in my body. He had enthused and praised every effort of mine; whenever any reputation touched my shores he used to rejoice like a mother savouring her child's good name. I got lost in grateful memory of the many good turns of the great benefactor. I found no means to assuage my surging sadness. I thought of composing a few verses. The grief in my heart took the form of verses. When I realized that I would not be able to see his benign form anymore, his presence reverentially lodged in my mind appeared before me.

'*Karunaiyenum kadalperugu madaiyá ninadhuvizhik*
kadaiyun seedhath
Tharunamadhi yanaiyamuga mandalamun theliyamudha
thárai pola
Varuminiya mozivákkum varuvorkku varaiyádhu
vazhangu kaiyum
Thiruvarutsup piramania gurumaniyae kánbadhendru
siriyaen manno.

(When shall this insignificant Me
Ever again see your eyes
An ocean of grace unbounded,
Set eyes on your face

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Charming like a full moon,
Hear your voice gentle
Suffused with sweetness,
Glimpse your hands
Ever eager to give with grace?
O Subramania
The holy sage
The Mentor Supreme
Grace incarnate!

I remembered his loving words, "You should leave at an auspicious time," when I was setting out to Madras. I had, of course, thought that it was an auspicious moment. But, it proved to be the harbinger of a tragedy.

'Nalvelai thanirchennai nagarkkaegap purappadena
navindrae yennai
Olvaelai thanilvidutthái avvelai ninaippiriya
ugnatrum theeya
Alvaelai yenbadhanai ariyádhu pirindhu thuya
radaindhae nandhoe
Vilvaelai vendraperu viraludaichchu ppiramania
vimala vázhvae'.

(To Madras you sent me
At a time auspicious
So I parted,
Auspicious was not the hour
The harbinger of wrenching evil,
Alas, I knew not then
I left only to plunge in grief.
O Subramaniá!
The conqueror of Cupid's arrow!
My own dear Life!)

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Likewise, I composed a few Virutthams also; also some Vennpás and two 'Kannis'; these are the two Vennpás:

'Deivath Thamizhin sezhunchuvayaip páráttum
Saivak kozhundhin sabaikánba dhennálo?

("When will the day dawn again
To witness the Assembly
Presided by the luminous saint
To savour the nectar
Of Tamil mellifluous?")

'indirppár vandhá rilaren riyambuguna
Kundrinmozhi kaetuvagai koorunál ennálo?

("Which day will dawn again
To hear the voice
Of the paragon of virtue _
'No mendicants today
To seek alms?")

Holding these verses in my hand I plunged into grief in solitude. I cursed my misfortune, left that night and reached Thiruvávaduthurai the next morning.

Could I see the objects of my love and reverence? I visited the places associated with Desikar – where he used to stand, his abode, the place where he used to take lessons. All places soaked in his memory. I imagined his presence there. But, his absence was a rude presence.

The New Head:

The new Head who took the name of Sri Ambalavána Desikar, assumed the position as the Mutt's 17th successive leader. He spoke affectionately to me and consoled me. My grief was beyond any attempt at solace. Things continued in their own pace in Thiruvávaduthurai. One leader had gone;

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but another leader had arrived. Guru Poojá was performed for the departed leader; festivities were held to welcome the other. The entire village wore a festive look.

But, for those who had basked in the grace of Subramania Desikar, their hearts were brimming with grief. They were moving from place to place like zombies in the midst of the festivities and din.

Guru Poojá:

There was the usual ceremonial worship at Desikar's Samádhi everyday. The last day was marked by special poojás. The devotees and the monks of the Mutt thronged from far and wide to attend the ceremony. Hundreds of dignitaries and scholars had come from Thirunelveli area. I met some of them and talked to them.

There were many devotees and disciples of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt in Thirunelveli. Two of them were notable personalities: Kavirája Nellaiappa Pillai and Kavirája Eswaramoorthiá Pillai, both descendants of the eminent Ambalavána Kaviráyar. The younger Kaviráyar Eswaramoorthiá Pillai had come for the Guru poojá. I had benefited from a manuscript I obtained from his house as a part of my Chinthámani publication. Hoping that some more useful manuscripts of Patthuppáttu may be available I raised a point with him. "Your help was of immense value to me for my Chinthámani publication. Presently I am planning to publish Patthuppáttu. Had Desikar been around he would have been of great help. Unfortunately we have lost him. I am in great need of help from friends like you. Research into ancient Tamil texts is indeed very demanding. It would be helpful if I could access Patthuppáttu manuscripts. I have been thinking of visiting your house in Thirunelveli and reviewing the manuscripts available with you. I seek your

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permission for that. Moreover, I would appreciate your help in seeing the manuscripts available in the houses of other scholars." He promised help without any reservation.

A Reproach:

An assembly was convened at the Mutt on the final day of Guru poojá. It was presided over by the new Chief Ambalavána Desikar. Many scholars expressed their condolences over Subramania Desikar's passing. And also greeted and praised the new Head of the Mutt. They also explained the meanings of the verses they had composed. I was not present there.

A disciple of the Mutt, Pazhani Kumára Thambirán, read an elegy composed by him.

In examining a portion of the elegy he reportedly stated, "In this portion I have recalled the precious part played by the Sannidánam in the publication of Seevaga Chinthámani by a student of the Mutt Sáminátha Iyer who is presently teaching at the Kumbakonam college." At that point a person in the gathering interjected, " It is not proper for a Saivite Mutt like ours to give prominence to a Jain text. Though Sáminátha Iyer is close to this Mutt it is a mistake that he had published this Jain text which had been condemned by Umápathi Sivácháriyár as a 'tissue of lies'. We should not only condemn it but also prevent any further circulation of that book." He was from some other part and had been staying in the Mutt for a short while. He was also known to me.

On hearing this, the Thambirán and others were stunned. They got angry with him. They opposed him and silenced him with proper arguments. My friend Pulikutti Rámalinga Thambirán went to the extent of composing

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condemnatory verses against him, taught those verses to the school students and made sure they recited the verses in his ear-shot.

This news left me sad. But some of my friends advised me not to get worked up. "There are jealous persons who are intent on spreading calumny and abuse. Even a trivial cause would be good enough for them to spread their vile. There is no point in worrying about such things. Those who know your true worth and effort would simply ignore such characters."

Guru Poojá was over. Visitors from other places returned to their respective homes. I took up my research on Patthuppáttu, soaked in thoughts of the kindness and benevolence of Sri. Subramania Desikar.

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104. JOURNEY TO THIRUNELVELI

Before I could get over the grievous loss of Subramania Desikar I had to encounter another terrible blow. In the beginning of the same year 1888 Sri Thyágarása Chettiár, who was next only to Subramania Desikar among my great patrons, also reached the feet of the Lord.

Thyágarása Chettiár's Demise:

I used to receive letters frequently from Chettiár. Someone else would write the letters on his behalf. I learnt from those letters that Chettiár's health was in serious decline but I did not imagine that his end would strike me so soon.

Chettiár reached Lord Shivá's feet on January 19, 1888. I received the news only the next day. I was tormented by anguish that I had not gone earlier to see him. My mind was in turmoil that my Patthuppáttu research should commence under the shadow of these two grievous losses. The condition of the palmleaf manuscripts also appeared to be in sync with my pathetic condition.

Assailed by the grief over Chettiár's loss, I composed a few verses. Here is one such verse:

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Madiyenrun thavirdhiyari vinaivalarkkum noolgal miga magizhndhae mellap
Padiyendrun chuvaiyozhugap pádendru menakkanbir pagarvor yárae
Midiyenru menaiyagalach cheyunthiyága rásanenum maenmaionae
Thudiyenru morukaratthá nadiyenru maravádha thooimaiyonae

(The great Thiágarásan!
The gracious one
Who banished my penury,
Who ever lodged in his heart
The Lord with drum in his hand!
Whom are we left with
One like you
To tender wise counsel,
To bestow tirelessly on us
Knowledge bountiful
By reading noble texts
Ever so meaningfully sweetly.)

Chettiár's students and those who had known his greatness were struck with grief. Many of them wrote letters to me sharing their grief. Chettiár's student and Coimbatore College Tamil pundit, Sabápathi Pillai had composed a number of verses. In one such verse he had also mentioned my name:

Poiyadaiyádha Sirámalaith Thyága puravalanseer
Meiyadai návalar munpuvi nátti virumpemarai
Paiyadai kákkudan thaichámi náthaiyan pakkalilae
Kaiyadai yákki yaganrá nidhunalla káriyamae

(The patron peerless
Thiágarásan of Sirámalai
Firmly established

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*Among scholars far and wide_*
Lo, he has left us
Who deified and loved him,
Left us in the hands of
Sáminátháyyar of Kudanthai
Full of groves of foliage green-
A grace he has bestowed.)

Though my grief over the passing of Subramania Desikar and Thyágarása Chettiár was profound, I did not stop my research on 'Patthuppáttu'. I thought I could plunge into this research to forget my grief. I would frequently feel that access to more palmleaf versions would help shape a good text. It would then occur to me that had Subramania Desikar been alive, he would've arranged for getting many palmleaf mauscripts from the Thirunelveli area. Whenever I found some good copies, I immediately thought of Thyágarása Chettiár and how this would have gladdened him.

I set out:

During my research on Patthuppáttu I was often overcome by confusion about the content, lack of clarity about the meaning and the point of completion of some verses. This drove me to despair. I even thought of giving up on this frustrating effort. But, the next moment I would set my eyes on something rare and interesting. It would immediately fill me with enthusiasm - we can spend a lifetime on this beautiful journey. At that point I realized that it would be more worthwhile to search for good copies instead of getting entangled in manuscripts without any basic texts or riddled with innumerable mistakes. With this idea in view, I thought of venturing to Thirunelveli during the month of May that year.

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I took leave of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam Head Ambalavána Desikar. He lavished affection on me and immediately sent a message to Sri Sáminátha Thambirán of Thirunelveli Eesána Mutt, an institution associated with Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. Desikar directed him to extend all possible assistance to me on my reaching Thirunelveli. I also wrote a letter to Kavirája Eeswaramoorthy Pillai about my proposed trip to Thirunelveli.

I reached Thirunelveli on an auspicious date and made Eesāna Mutt as my place of residence. The Thambirán there took good care of all my needs. Then I met Kavirája Eeswaramoorthiá Pillai. He and his elder brother were expecting my arrival. I was speaking to them for a while. Some other dignitaries were also present there. Our conversation centred on Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt, Subramania Desikar's great qualities, Pillaivál's profound scholarship and also about Tamil literature.

A Temple of Tamil:

Those two brothers were men of wealth. Their noble qualities lent lustre to their wealth. Kavirája Nellaiappa Pillai's house was located in the South New Street. There was a rustling canal both in the front and in the back portion of the house. There was constant flow of water. Behind the house was a large garden and a pleasant garden house. He was a generous and an influential man. Dignitaries and scholars often visited him. The grace of the goddess of wealth beautifully fitted their family steeped in Shivá devotion and Tamil learning.

Nellaiappa Pillai had built a large private shrine in his house. A sacred Vilvá tree was there too and received poojá everyday.

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The very next day I started reviewing the pamleaf manuscripts in the houses of the two brothers. Kavirája Pillai Eswaramurthy's house in West Street had a good library. It was their ancestral home. They opened the library. It was a thrilling sight for me. 'In the ancient Sangam Age had they secured palmleaf manuscripts in such a meticulous manner!' I was overwhelmed. The manuscripts were arranged in neat rows. They were properly and systematically tied in bundles. No dust, no insects. The manuscripts were not mixed up. It looked like a veritable temple of Tamil. I examined the manuscripts. There were different kinds of texts. There were also palmleaf versions of printed books. I was consumed by a desire to read all the manuscripts immediately.

My Anxiety:

At the outset I started looking for the *Patthuppáttu* copy. I landed one manuscript. It contained only the first four verses of *Porunarátruppadai*. Even here the original text was not available. 'Even in such a wonderful place Patthuppáttu is not available! Where else am I going to find?' This anxiety seized me.

"Lost in thought?" Nellaippa Kaviráyar asked me.

"Oh yes! I thought I would get the entire wealth of Tamil in this place resembling the house of a Sangam poet. But I am not able to get a full copy of the work I am looking for. What other place can I find equalling this Temple of Tamil? What I can't get here, can I hope to get anywhere else? What a pity that the Tamil world has been treating with indifference the great works of the ancient Sangam savants." I told him sorrowfully.

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"Don't imagine that there is only one such house. Many kinds of palmleaf manuscripts are available in a few other places also. There are many houses of poets in places like Srivaikundam. You can find thousands of palmleaf manuscripts in those houses. So, please don't lose heart." Kavirájá told me reassuringly. I felt as if the Goddess of Tamil enshrined there was extending her hand as succour to me. I continued my review of the manuscripts.

Konguvell Mákkadhai:

At that point I came upon an old palmleaf manuscript with a slip attached to it which said, "*Konguvell Mákkádhai*'. At that time I had no idea what kind of work it was. But I had come across that name in the commentary on '*Illakkana Kotthu*'. Sri Sáminátha Desikar was the author of that work. He lamented the situation of people not devoting time on 'noble works, but wasting their time in worthless texts.' "Get involved with *Thiruvái Kovai*. The wisdom of Mánikkavásagar tells us through this work that Shivá alone is the Supreme Truth. Lord Azhagiya Thiruchitrambalam Udaiyár, enraptured by his utterances, took it down in writing by his holy hand. Ignoring its greatness these people get associated with works such as *Chinthámani*, *Silappadhikáram*, *Manimekalai*, Sangam Poetry and *Konguvell Mákkadhai*. They waste their time and ruin their life by extolling writing such as '*Patthuppáttu*', *Ettutthokai*, *Padhinennkeezhkkanakku* and stories of *Rámanujan* and *Harishchandran*...."

I remembered that Konguvell Mákadhai was one of the works pilliored by that stauch Saivite. I took that manuscript thinking that it could be the story of one Konguvell. There was also a collection containing six of the Eight Anthologies (*Ettu Thokai*) excluding *Kalitthokai* and *Paripádal*. With

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Kavirájar's permission I took those manuscripts. I spent two days in his house in reading those manuscripts. One morning they took me to the houses of their relatives and friends to look at the palmleaf manuscripts available there. Firstly we went to the house of Sálivádeeswara Odhuvár a great savant and a relative of theirs. Then we visited a few other places. Those places contained many manuscripts and printed books but no Sangam poetry.

Thagadoor Yátthirai:

Then we went to South New Street house of Krishna Vádhiyár. There I saw a manuscript of *Tholkáppiyam* commentary. A note was appended to the bundle. 'I have got this copy as a loan from my friend in Nánguneri, after lending him my copy of *Thagadoor Yátthirai*. 'There was no indication of the identity of the friend. There is a reference to Thagadoor Yátthirai' in the Tholkáppiyam commentary. I had therefore realized it must be an ancient work. On noting that the Thagadoor Yátthirai text was in Nánguneri I thought I should try to locate it. I asked my friends there if there were Kaviráyar houses in Nánguneri.

"Yes. The place is dominated by Vaishnavites. Vaishnavite texts should be available there," they said.

"In this copy there is a note that the Thagadoor Yátthirai manuscript had been handed over to a person in Nánguneri. Can we get it if we go there and search?" I asked him.

"Maybe, but can't be sure. Who is reading such texts these days? You have been searching for *Patthuppáttu* and you have not managed to get the full text. Likewise you may not be able to get this text too. At the same time, as this Tholkáppiyam copy is here it is possible that the Thagadoor Yátthirai text given in exhchange, could possibly be there."

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"I hope so, " I replied.

Later I went to Nánguneri four times in search of manuscripts but I could not locate Thagadoor Yáthirai. And many ancient texts had departed from this world. This fine text might also have suffered a similar fate.

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105. GOOD COPIES OF PATTHUPPÁTTU

In other houses:

I had searched in a number of houses, but was disheartened that my search was unsuccessful. With anguish I asked Kaviráyar Nellaiappa Pillai if there were any other places to search.

"Lord Nellaiappar should himself bestow grace on you to help you access the palmleaf manuscripts you are looking for. I am at my wit's end. There is one more house. If the text is not to be found there also, we may conclude that it is not available in this village."

Thiruppárkadanáthan Kaviráyar:

"Whose house is that?" I asked eagerly.

"Here in Vannárpettai there once lived one Thirupp árkadanáthan Kaviráyar, a foremost disciple of our ancestor Ambalavána Kaviráyar. He was a great savant. There are many palmleaf manuscripts in his house. Let's go and try. His grandson, by his own name, lives there now."

"Why not go there straightaway?" I tried to push him hard.

"Okay, let's go," and he took me there. Thirupp árkadanáthan Kaviráyar greeted both of us very warmly. He appeared to be a noble person. Kavirája Nellaiappa Pillai

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heaped praise on him and then introduced me to him. He told him that I had come in search of manuscripts of Patthuppáttu and other Sangam works. He said at once, "Oh! I wish I had known a little earlier. Only yesterday sub-judge Kanagasabai Mudaliár had taken from here the manuscripts of *Ettutthokai*, Patthuppáttu and *Padhinennkeezhkkanakku* works and sent them to his friends. They are good copies. Had he come earlier I would sure have given them to him." I felt truly sad that I had missed the treasure by a whisker. I guessed that the house should have manuscripts of other ancient Tamil works and sought his permission to look at the other palmleaf manuscripts stored there. As it was already 8 0' clock in the night Thiruppárkadanáthan Kavir áyar suggested that I could come the next morning. Accordingly, Nellaiappa Kaviráyar and I went there the next morning. We were accompanied by Ananthakrishna Kavir áyar who was working as a Tamil teacher at Thirunelveli Hindu College. Thiruppárkadanáthan Kaviráyar took out and placed for our view all palmleaf books that he had in his house, close to 500 of them. Three quarters of them were works composed by his grandfather. All three of us shared the work of reviewing those books. I took one set of palmleaves, Ananthakrishna Kaviráyar took another, a large one.

To my query he replied that it was *Thirumurugátruppadai*. I felt happy that we may be on the right track. He turned a few more palmleaves and said aloud, 'Porunarátruppadai.'I felt that this could be the '*Patthuppáttu*' (Ten Idylls). I was looking for and was lost in gratitude to the grace of Lord Parameswara. With moist eyes I could barely see. I requested Ananathakrishna Kaviráyar to look at the other bundles too. All the ten idylls of 'Patthuppáttu', with commentary, were arranged in a neat order. Really old manuscripts. I was overwhelmed with joy and amazement.

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At the end there was a note:" I had given a *Tholkáppiyam* manuscript to Kaviráyar of Srivaikundam and took this from him in the year of the Kollam era. Calculating the year it appeared that, that note would have been written a hundred and fifty years ago and the text would have been written some two hundred years earlier. Taking some time to digest this huge discovery, we resumed our search. We found *Chinthámani*, *Konguvell Mákkadhai* and some *Prabandams*. Konguvell Mákkadhai had been copied from an earlier text with neither a beginning nor an end. It was already 12 0' clock. I gratefully received these texts from the owner and brought them home. I was overjoyed to find a complete text of *Patthuppáttu* Idylls.

Rámá Story and Other Texts:

I found that even in the Patthuppáttu palmleaf manuscripts obtained from Thiruppárkadanátha Mudaliár's house, the basic text was not separately available. I checked up with my friends if there were other places in Thirunelveli where we could search for more manuscripts. They mentioned that many manuscripts were available in the house of one Sampirathi Thiruppárkadanátha Pillai, a big official of the olden days. I went to that house and found that all the manuscripts related to later periods. It was gratifying to find that many scholars had carefully preserved ancient Tamil treasures.

Evidently the dignitaries had collected and stored only those works which they read and savoured. I found the manuscripts of Kamba Rámáyanam titled 'Ráman's Story, '*Harichandra Puránam*' with the title 'Harichandran's Story' and *Naidatham* called '*Nalan's Story*'. I recollected that the author of *Ilakkana Kotthu* (Sáminátha Desikar) had referred to Ráman's Story, Harichandran's Story and Nalan's Story;

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I guessed that this was the custom how they designated narrative literary works in the South Pándyá lands.

Mayilerum Perumál Pillai:

I remembered the Mayilerum Perumál Pillai, the highly respected teacher of Desikar. Even the monk Sáminátha Desikar heaps praise on this teacher.

Thirunelveli yenumsiva puratthan thándaba
Moorthy thandhasen thamizhkkadal, vázhmayi
laerum perumál magipathi.

(In the Shiva site of Thirunelveli,
The lord on peacock mount rules supreme
In the ocean of glorious Tamil
Created by the Lord of Cosmic Dance.)

That savant had written a commentary for Kalládam. When Sangam works and Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary were not known in Tamil Nadu, Mayilerum Perumál Pillai's commentary had a reputed presence. As the scholar lived in Thirunelveli, I nursed a hope that it could be beneficial to look for manuscripts in his house. I asked Nellaiappa Kaviráyar if some descendants of Mayilerum Perumál Pillai lived there. "There is indeed a descendant by the same name, Mayilerum Perumál Pillai. He is out and out a worldly-minded person, with no involvement in Tamil literature. In any case, I will introduce him to you." He immediately sent for him.

He came. Nellaiappa Kaviráyar introduced me to him; "He has come to look for palmleaf manuscripts. As you belong to a family of great scholars, he would like to look for some manuscripts in your house." He replied: "I agree that I come from a family of great scholars. This scholarship

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continued till my father's time. But, he didn't train me in Tamil grammar and literature; I pursued English education and I am presently working as a lawyer's clerk. I have some training in law. I have lot of law books in my house. As the old palmleaf manuscripts were occupying a lot of space in my house, I had given them all away to those who were interested. All I am left with are only case-bundles."

"Please don't say so." I tried to intervene. "There may still be one or two old pieces. May we try to have a look?"

"I keep my house neat and clean. How would any manuscript be hiding in my house without my knowledge? Don't mistake me. I am not suggesting that you shouldn't come to my house. Please do come. I will treat you as a guest. But, don't raise the question of palmleaf manuscripts; I would be able to give you only if I have one." He nearly closed the subject. When I was about to say something he left saying, "I have a lot of work. Please give leave. I'm off."

I felt sad. What a change in one family! Where was Mayilerum Perumál Pillai who wrote commentary on Kall ádam and where is his descendant Mayilerum Perum ál? What a fall!

Nellaiappa Kaviráyar's Help:

Over the next two days I saw a few more houses in Thirunelveli, took leave of Nellaiappa Kaviráyar and his younger brother and left for Kumbakonam. My heart was full with gratitude for all the help extended by Nellaiappa Kaivráyar.

How can I express my gratitude! As I was leaving I composed the following Vennpá stanza in his honour:

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Sangath thamizhai thalarvinri yan peravae
Angan gudanvan thalitthitton – pongupugazh
Inboedu meesanadi yennunellai yappanppol
Anboe dudhavi seivá rár."

(Relentlessly tirelessly he led me far and wide
In my arduous search in quest of Sangam Tamil
Who will render such help with love so touching
As noble Nellaiyappan deeply devoted to Lord's feet?)

Disappointment Again:

On return to Kumbkonam I briefed Ambalavána Desikar about the details of my Thirunelveli trip. Then I started researching on the Vannárppettai manuscript, collating it with the other manuscripts with me. That copy also had a few missing portions. While at Thirunelveli I had been told that there were many scholars' families in Âzhwárthirunagari. I had a temptation to go there and try my luck. There was a break of a few days in college in connection with Ávani Avittam' function. I decided to go there during this break. I wrote letters to a few friends in that area, to Pannirukai Thambirán, the main steward of Thiruvávaduthurai at Javanthipuram and to Sivaráma Iyer, who was the inspector of Schools there.

Kanagasabai Mudaliár:

Kanagasabai Mudaliár was then a sub-judge in Thirunelveli. I had got acquainted with him when I was engaged in the publication of *Chinthámani*; he had also extended help to me then. He was then in Thanjávoor. He was a noble person with involvement in Tamil.

After he had gone to Thirunelveli he had sent a letter to me; "I have come to this place. There are many residences

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of Tamil scholars here. Old palmleaf manuscripts would be available there. Should you require them for your research, I would be happy to be of help." As he had gone out of town during my visit to Thirunelveli I could not see him. Thinking of another visit I wrote a letter to him also.

All my friends answered me with evident enthusiasm, but there was no response from Kanagasabai Mudaliár. I guessed that he might be out of town and that I should still try to call on him when I reached Thirunelveli.

At the commencement of the Ávani Avita holiday I left Kumbakonam and reached Thirunelveli the next morning. First I called on Kanagasabai Mudaliár. Much against my expectation he said, "I had promised another person to help him in his search for palmleaf manuscripts. Therefore, I'm sorry . I'm not in a position to be of help to you."

Ázhwárthirunagari:

Then I met my friend A.Krishnasámi Iyer, who was working as an advocate and was living in Kailásapuram. He encouraged me by saying that I should not feel despondent. Then he gave a letter of introduction to Lawyer E.Subbaráya Mudaliár of Srivaikundam. I went to Srivaikundam with his letter. Mudaliár was gracious enough to take me to Alwárthirunagari. On the way I saw the manuscripts in the houses of a few scholars in Vellore. Patthuppáttu was not available. I also met my friends in Alwárthirunagari. They had already collected palmleaf manuscripts from the houses of many scholars and kept them ready for my review. First I went to the house of Lakshmana Kaivráyar. He was a descendant of an illustrious scholar by name Theerádha Vinai Theertha Thirumeni Kaviráyar. His house had thousands of manuscripts. Three days of exhaustive search did not yield '*Patthuppáttu*' manuscript. The search continued

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in the houses of many other scholars. Nowhere was it available. This left me very frustrated. Looking at my predicament Lakshmana Kaviráyar told me, "I had forgotten one thing. My father-in-law lives here. My servant had given away to him some palmleaf manuscripts which were in my house. Maybe we could go there and find out if the text you are looking for is available there.." I requested him to try his best to somehow locate that text. As there was a temple festival, Perumál and Sadagopázhvár were being taken in a ceremonial procession along my street one night. I savoured the benign presence of Nammázhvár and prayed to him that my effort should bear fruit. Then I sat on the thinnai of the house where I had my meals with my friend. The moon was shining in all its glory. At that point Lakshmana Kaviráyar rushed towards us, handed over a palmleaf manuscript to me saying, "Look at this text. Only this piece was available with my father-in-law. I have brought it here with the promise of returning it after review". In my extreme eagerness I opened the manuscript and looked at it intently in the moonlight. Suddenly the name '*Mullaippáttu*' flashed before my eyes. My joy knew no bounds. I quietly turned over the leaf. Seven poems were there, beginning with Thirumurugátruppadai, in perfect order. I told my friend that my fervent prayers to Ázhwár were not in vain. In sheer joy I could not have a wink of sleep that night. Next day I received from Lakshmana Kaviráyar that particular manuscript as well as *Aingkurunooru*, *Padhitruppatthu* and *Purapporull Vennpá Málai*, took leave of my friend, called on a few friends in Thirunelveli and returned to Kumbakonam.

I had described in detail the trials and tribulations I had encountered during this spell of search in an article in Kalaimagal magazine entitled '*Nilavil Malarndha Mullai*'

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(Mullai flower that blossomed in moonlight). This has also been included in the second part of my book entitled '*Nallurai Kovai*'. In the interest of space I have only briefly outlined them in this chapter.

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106. GOOD OMEN

Vellore Kaviráyar's House:

When I was searching for palmleaf manuscripts in a reputed scholar's house in a place called Vellore, I chanced upon a copy of *Kamba Rámáyanam*. In that text the name was written as, '*Rámávatháram*'. In one verse in Kamba Rámáyanam the name Rámávatháram is referred to :

'Nadaiyi ninruyar náyagan retratthin
Idaini gazhndha irámáva thárap paerth
Thodaini rambiya dhomaru mákkadhai."

(A great sublime story
Strung with poems felicitous
By name Rámávathárá
About the hero supreme)

It occurred to me that Rámávatháram must have been the original name of Rámáyaná. Later, when I was reviewing the '*Puratthirattu*' text, the quotations from 'Kamba Rámáyaná' were referred to as from Rámávatháram. It went to confirm that Rámávatháram was indeed the original name.

At that time the authorship of the commentary on *Thiruchitrambala Kovaiyár* was not known. Many scholars thought that Nachinárkkiniyar was the commentator. I thought so too. In the bio-note on Nachinárkkiniyar I had

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appended to the first edition of *Seevaga Chinthámani*, I had mentioned *Thirukovaiyár* as one of the texts for which Nachinárkkiniyar had written the commentary. But in a palmleaf manuscript I found in Vellore Kaviráyar's house, the commentary was attributed to Perásiriyar. Immediately I changed my earlier untested opinion that Nachinárkkiniyar had written the commentary on Kovaiyár. This position was reinforced from the *Prayogaviveká* commentary. When I visited their house, the head of the household had taken ill, and I had to return to Kumbakonam without taking any book from there.

I started researching on *Patthuppáttu* with all the texts I had collected. In some of the bundles not even one of the Ten Idylls was available. In some texts some parts were missing. Some others were replete with mistakes. No text contained the full text of the original poem in a continuous order. I was seized of a concern where I was going to obtain a clean and correct copy.

The Copy of Veerapándiya Kaviráyar:

During one of my usual visits to Thiruvávaduthurai, I briefed the Head of the Ádheenam, Ambalavána Desikar about my journeys in search of '*Patthuppáttu*' text. "Even after all these attempts, I've not been able to get a clean and complete text. It would be very helpful if the Sannidánam could direct the officials of the Mutt to try to locate a copy of the text and send it to me." Sensing my sense of despondency Desikar told me reassuringly, "Don't lose heart. Our Ádheenam units are located in different parts of Tamil land. We will arrange for instructions to all those units to somehow access *Patthuppáttu* text and send it to you." I profusely thanked Desikar and took leave of him.

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After two weeks I received a letter from Thiruvávaduthurai.

"Sannidánam has written to the officials in the Southern parts. We are expecting good news. Don't worry." The letter was from the Chief Writer Ponnusámi Chettiár. The very next week I went to Thiruvávaduthurai to ascertain the latest situation. When I was about to set foot in the State Room, I heard the Ádheenam Head directive "Ponnusāmi Chettiár! Bring the *Patthuppáttu* text and hand it over to Iyer!" I was overjoyed on hearing this and sat at the feet of the Ádheenam Head. Ponnusāmi Chettiár handed over the palmleaf manuscripts to me. I opened it immediately. It contained all the ten idylls, the text and the commentary occurring together. I was thrilled that the copy contained the entire text of Patthuppáttu. I scanned it part by part. As I turned each leaf my joy surged. It contained a note that it had been copied from Veerapándiya Kaviráyar copy by Kumárasámi Pillai who was a Tamil pundit in Thoothukudi Caldwell College.

Full of Pleasant Surprise:

I asked the Ádheenam Head, "Wherefrom was this copy obtained?"

"There is an official by name Veerabágu in our Thiruchendur Mutt; a competent person. He got this for us and sent it". I brought the copy to Kumbakonam and compared it with another copy I had with me. Many errors got clarified. While I was still concerned that I did not have the genuine original text, I was satisfied that I had got a relatively correct and complete copy of *Patthuppáttu*, and set about getting it ready for publication.

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Flaw in Kurinji:

In the meanwhile I had to face another problem. One part was missing in Kurinji Páttu. This gap was found in all the copies. It was not possible to determine how many lines were missing. Looking at the commentary it appeared as if only a small portion was missing. It was a passage containing a catalogue of flowers arranged in a certain order. On either side of the gap names of flowers were mentioned the names of some flowers were not found in the missing portion. The joy of landing Veerabágu Kaviráyar manuscript was somewhat diminished by this shortcoming.

As I had encountered problems aplenty from the very beginning, this new problem started bothering me. At that point, the thought of Dharmapura Ádheenam, one of the ancient and reputed Saiva Ádheenams, came to my mind. Till then I had no opportunity to search for manuscripts available at Dharmapura Mutt. As there was a minor friction between the two Mutts, I wondered if my visiting Dharmapura Ádheenam might be viewed unfavourably.

As Dharmapura Ádheenam has patronized many reputed scholars, I nursed a hope that I would be able to get a good copy of *Patthuppáttu* in their archives. Realizing that such undue sensitivity would hinder Tamil research and come in the way of my work, I met the Head of Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam and informed him of my desire to search for manuscripts in Dharmapaura Mutt. Ambalavána Desikar not only endorsed my idea but even sent me in a cart, with Ponnusámi Chettiár accompanying me.

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Problem solved:*

Luck was on my side. I went to Dharmapura Mutt, called on the Head Sri.Mánikkavásaga Desikar, obtained his permission and started searching the manuscripts in their archives. I got what I looked for. I got a few stray leaves of Patthuppáttu. It helped me to fill the gap in Kurinjippáttu. I came to know that the names of four flowers had been left out. I expressed my thanks with a sense of fulfilment and returned to Kumbakonam with those manuscripts. I saw a large number of books at Dharmapuram. There was a copy of Ottakkootthar's '*Thakka Yága Barani*', both the basic text and commentary. As my heart was then not set on the text, I did not take it.

There was still a void which had remained unfilled; I did not have the full text of *Patthuppáttu* in its original form. There was a copy of *Patthuppáttu* in the Government's Manuscripts Library in Madras. I arranged to get it copied and reached to me. It contained the original text of two idylls. I decided that it would be futile to conduct an open-ended search for more copies of Patthuppáttu, and commenced preparation for printing the text.

Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer was with me and was of great help. Sri Chokkalinga Thambirán who had taken lessons under me, Sri.Má.Vee.Rámánujácháriár and several other friends extended a lot of help in my Patthupáttu research.

Another Edition:

When I was searching for manuscripts in Thirunelveli area, I published my experiences in Sudesamitran Journal.

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* *A detailed account of this story can be found in my Kalaimagal essay entitled 'Udhirndha Malargal'(The Fallen Flowers)*

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On reading the piece Tamil scholar Thi.Tha. Kanagasundaram Pillai, who was working in the Head Office of the Department of Education in Madras wrote a letter to me on 18.9.1888. His letter said, "..... for some time I have been searching for Paththuppáttu copies and correcting errors to the extent possible. Only scholars like you should publish Ettutthokai. We shall publish *Patthuppáttu* to the best of our ability." I immediately replied him stating clearly that I had already arranged for printing and publishing *Patthuppáttu*. His letter dated 30.9.1888 contained his response: "I am sorry to tell you that I had been engaged in the same work as you. I understand that you are planning to publish *Silappadhikáram*. I am going to complete my edition of *Patthuppáttu*. Don't mistake me on this account."

I wrote back, "Do publish it in your own way. I shall publish it in my light. There is enough room and readership in Tamil Nadu for the two books. " I sent this reply and proceeded with my *Patthuppáttu* research.

Milk Kávadi:

I gave a final reading to the entire text and arranged it properly to be given for printing. Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer was with me in giving it a final shape. After completing the other nine Idylls I reviewed *Thirumurugátruppadai*. I arranged for a proper reading of the main text and the commentary.

The Thirumurugátruppadai text was completed at 9 0' clock one morning. I had a feeling of satisfaction at this point, the *nádhaswaram* music was floating in from the street. One Naidu, a devotee of Lord Subramania, was carrying a milk kávadi, with *vibhoothi* smeared all over his body. Tiny spears (*Alagu*) were struck all over his body and he was dancing his way, chanting devotional hymns

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on Lord Murugá. The nádhaswaram artiste was playing the instrument in tune with his ecstatic dance.

The completion of *Thirumurugátruppadai* text and the sight of the devotee of *Murugan* appearing with milk-kavadi synchronized beautifully. After the many travails I had undergone, this sight was soothing. Overcome by joy I told Krishna Iyer, "We have completed *Thirumurugátruppadai* and we are witnessing this sight as a sign that God's grace will be with us in successfully completing this endeavour."

"Good omen indeed." He said in warm endorsement.

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107. A STRONG CRITICISM

Seevaga Chinthámani received warm reception in Tamil Nadu. The scholars who had learnt many new aspects from the book paid encomiums to me and also urged me to publish *Patthuppáttu* very early. Many ancient works such as *Puranánooru* had been referred to in my foreword in Seevaga Chinthámani and also in the footnotes to the text. The readers who noted this enocouraged me to publish these ancient texts one by one.

Some Mischief:

While support was growing from many aficionados, mischief from a few jealous persons also started raising its head. The few scholars who enjoyed being negative entered the fray to condemn several aspects of Seevaga Chinthámani publication. Some of the errors pointed out by them were indeed mistakes which required to be corrected. But their purpose was not to help correct errors but somehow to condemn the work and besmirch my reputation. The tone and tenor of the criticism betrayed their animus and did not show their love of Tamil. At all times the world is not short of such people.

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Errors and Corrections:

When Chinthámani was published, there was very little exposure of such works in Tamil Nadu. When a work is published in the face of considerable difficulties in such an atmosphere, it is natural for a few errors to creep in. In the matter of publication of ancient texts, it is not uncommon for each succeeding edition incorporating corrections to earlier faulty readings, incorporating fresh insights into the true meaning and also providing additional new information. It is simply not possible to produce a perfect edition straightaway. I have myself corrected many errors in the first edition of my book, in subsequent editions. Based on the knowledge gained from new research, persisting wrong understanding also gets corrected. Has not Thiruvalluvar said '*Aridho rariyámai kandatrál* (One's ignorance is discovered the more one learns).

There were errors in my Chinthámani edition because of my ignorance. I had mentioned in the first edition that Thirutthakka Thevar had gone to Madurai and met Sangam scholars. Later I came to know that it was not correct. During my subsequent research, I realized that he had met persons associated with Jain Sanga. Likewise, many mistakes in respect of the names of books and the names of poets appear in the first edition of *Chinthámani*. I gradually corrected these errors. The reading we adopt as correct today may subsequently be found to be faulty and we adopt a new reading. How can we at all declare as full and final any work of research based on man's limited knowledge?

Everyone realizes this but this would not occur to those driven by jealousy. Three school Tamil teachers of Kumbakonam were keenly involved in this criticism. They had derived some personal benefits from me. They issued

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many pamphlets criticizing that it was wrong on my part to have published a Jain text, that it was unbecoming of the Head of a Saivaite Mutt to have extended help to this effort, that my edition was full of errors - far more than the sand in the seashore and stars in the sky. Initially, they issued these pamphlets in others' names. Later it appeared in their own names. They distributed the pamphlets in the streets of Kumbakonam. They sent them to Thiruchiráppalli, Thanjávoor, Madurai, Thiruppádirippuliyoor and Madras and sent bundles of such pamphlets to my patrons in Madras. Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár, Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár, R.V.Srinivása Iyer and others informed me of this development. I continued my Patthuppáttu research in such a negative atmosphere. A magazine named *Kudanthaimithran* was being published in Kumbakonam for a brief while. Articles used to appear in this journal, praising and condemning me in alternate issues. My friends appeared to have remained unaffected by such diatribes. Some of these people had made it a habit of condemning someone or something and had also developed typical defamatory language to express their views. Consequently even some truth in their criticism failed to register with most people.

Invocation to Lord Murugá:

One day I was engaged in researching Patthuppáttu, Thirumānoor Krishna Iyer, Kudaváyil Shamugam Pillai and a few other students were with me. We happened to talk about the activities of the adversarial groups. I had already been considerably hassled by the difficulties faced in the research; the malicious criticism caused me deep anguish. 'If I start answering all the vile criticism, my research work will suffer. We can perhaps answer fair criticism. Where is the recourse to jealous fulminations?' I lost myself in devotion to Lord Murugá. My emotion took the form of a few

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verses. Here are a few of them:

Agamae yorusol araivan nigaril
Magamae uvalaith tharulval lalarull
Kuganae Murugá Kumará Thiruvae
Ragavae lavaven razhainee dhinamae."

(O Mind!
Beseech unto him daily
The son of the Lord
Who bent the invincible Meru,
Guhanae! Murugá!
Kumárá! Velavá!
Of the sacred Thiruvarangam).

"Malarkon dunaiyae vazhipattiduvaen
Alarkon duvilang kalaivá vigall soozh
Kalarkann dariyák kavinae ragaver
Palarkann digazhum padivaith thadhenae."

(I pray unto you
With floral offerings,
You the abode of beauty
Of Aeragam
Circled by lakes
Full of waves of flowers alluring,
But alas, not seen by the lowly.
Why have you condemned me
To the ridicule of many?)

"Thadhaitheenj chuvainat ramizhpá diyulam
Padhaiyá dhuraiyum padivaith tharullvái
Udhiayá dhibanae roliyá yaliyái
Sidhaiyá dhuraiyun thiruvae raganae."
(O Sun! Seated in Thiruverkam
As the light and grace

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Undiminished!
Pray keep my mind undisturbed
To savour and sing
Tamil rich and mellifluous).

An Attempt to Reply:

My benign neglect of their criticism infuriated the opponents all the more. One day a leaflet appeared bearing the title 'A Proclamation of the Defects of Seevaga Chinthámani'. They had declared as errors items which were very much in order. It occurred to me that I should give a proper reply. One day I sat till the late night and wrote down a refutation. It was not a pleasant job. I felt very sad. At that point, a soothsayer was passing through the street telling aloud his usual refrain: "Good days are ahead. Don't you worry!" Though it was his usual street cry, I took it as a special message addressed to me. When I completed writing my reply it was nearly dawn.

After completing my morning chores, I took the sheet containing my refutation and went to Sádhu Seshaiyyer. I went to him mainly because I wanted to have someone else read my note dispassionately and also because as a genuine well-wisher of mine Sádhu Sehsaiyyer would be able to offer sage counsel.

Sádhu Seshaiyyer's Advice:

I handed over the note to him and told him, "You are aware of the condemnation of my *Chinthámani* work floating around. It is not worthwhile to reply mere slander. But, to the best of my knowledge I have refuted some of the points referred to as errors in my text. I would appreciate your review of this note." He looked at it. I was eagerly waiting for his comment.

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He tore it apart and dumped it in the trashcan. This left me bewildered. He looked at me affectionately and told me in a soft voice, "Don't be upset I have torn away your note. You should never waste your time in trying to answer such charges. I'm very much aware that some persons are slandering you and unleashing abuses. I also know who they are. Have they made any impact on persons like me, on your students and on your well-wishers? Not a wee bit. Therefore, it is unnecessary for you to get worked up on such matters. Any reply from you would only go to bring unnecessary attention on your opponents. They would sure reply this note; you may be provoked to respond further; and this futile controversy would keep persisting. You would end up wasting your time. It is not uncommon that noble endeavours meet many obstacles. Such things happen in England too. Eminent people simply ignore them. Don't fritter away your valuable time in such pursuits. Promise me that you would never again try to respond in writing to such scurrilous attacks."

Initially I was not inclined to refute these charges. I wrote the note only after a lot of thought. Naturally enough I felt somewhat frustrated that my action has been resolutely dismissed. 'How he has torn away my note with disdain!'

"What are you thinking? Many more noble endeavours are waiting for you. Such distractions would prove to be obstacles in your path. Such censures would occupy the stage for a little while, and then disappear. A time would come when your detractors would have a change of heart and show you understanding and consideration. They might well regret their infractions. So, don't get dragged into this area of controversy. Be steadfast in your service in the cause of Tamil. God will be with you." It was a very thoughtful and concerned counsel.

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These words comforted me. "Henceforth I would take no notice of such attacks nor would I try to justify my stand." I gave him this assurance. When I look back at this distance of time, I realize the sagacity of the advice given by that great savant. The errors I commit as a part of my service to Mother Tamil would get corrected in due course. Ignoring that service, if someone chooses to attack me viciously with personal animus, I wouldn't care. The great Tamil, born in an abode sanctified by gentle breeze and sandalwood, is all tenderness and sweetness. I have adopted service at the feet of Mother Tamil as my life's mission. Thanks to the grace of that Goddess, the darts of animosity aimed at me would cause me no harm. They may derive satisfaction by publishing such venomous words. Why not we observe and rejoice at this display of perverse satisfaction. I started adopting this approach and found peace and tranquillity. I don't know if this is good or bad. But, this attitude saves me from getting disheartened, and help me pursue my work with enthusiasm. I can never forget that Sádhu Seshaiyyer was the source of this wisdom.

Some Letters:

I managed to steer clear of the storm of controversies. My mind got deeply involved in Patthuppáttu work. While so, some friends wrote letters to me strongly castigating these peddlars of controversies. Some others mentioned that they would like to publish letters of refutation in magazines and newspapers. Persons such as Poovai Kalyánasundara Mudaliár wrote to me on these lines. I requested them not to.

On 12.11.1888 I received a letter from Thi.Tha. Kanagasundaram Pillai of Chennai. While there was competition between him and me in the matter of *Patthuppáttu* publica-

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tion, the contents of his letter gave me comfort and surprise.

'... I happened to get hold of a booklet entitled 'A proclamation on the defects of *Seevaga Chinthámani*'. On reading it, I could discern the motive of the pamphleteers. While so, I wondered if there was an element of truth in some of their statements. On this basis I carefully reviewed their points with reference to the Chinthámani manuscript in my possession. It belied their statements and was in accordance with your reading. It became clear to me that they have unwittingly excommunicated themselves from the community of scholars by their shrill rage of envy and pettiness....'

This one letter gave me great comfort and wiped out my mental anguish caused by the vituperative attacks.

The Storm Changes Course:

My studied silence left these 'criticis' dejected and frustrated. Ignoring my earnest plea Kudavái Shanmugam Pillai crossed swords with the opposing group. His language was as ruthless as theirs. The condemnation fanned out into different areas, including the text-book they had published and the commentaries they had written. They wrote articles and spread abuse. This fight also took the form of verses. The words one would be ashamed to use even in face-to-face encounters found their way into printed verses. Eventually nothing worthwhile came out of this conflict.

Ever since he got involved in this unseemly conflict, I firmly told Shanmugam Pillai to stop coming to me.

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108. PUBLICATION OF PATTHUPPÁTTU

I started deliberating on how to face potential financial constraints in the publication of Patthup-páttu. As I did in the case of *Chinthámani*, I thought of approaching friends to subscribe to the edition; I printed a prospectus and an appeal and distributed to my friends.

Getting Subcriptions:

Madurai Deputy Collector M.Thillainayaga Pillai, Sádhu Seshaiyyer, Cholan Máligai Ratḥinam Pillai, R.V.Srinivása Iyer, Thanjavoor advocate K.S.Srinivása Pillai provided financial assistance. Siruvayal Zamindár Sri. Muthurámalinga Thevar, though not known to me earlier, wrote to me promising financial assistance. I could collect about 200 rupees. I came to know of a complaint from a dignitary in Kumbakonam; 'College pundit Sáminátha Iyer is collecting subscriptions on the plea that he was going to publish *Patthuppáttu*. It appears to me a mere ruse to collect money." I stopped collecting subscriptions from that day.

I had written to Pollachi Vidwán Sivan Pillai enquiring about the availability of a copy of Patthuppáttu. He sent me a copy he had in his possession. I reviewed it, decided to stop further research and got ready to leave for Madrás with Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer.

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Árumuga Thambirán:

The eleventh day of 1888 December was found to be auspicious. That morning Thándavaráya Thambirán , the chief steward of Thiruvannámalai Ádheenam Mutt at Káraikkudi and the vidwán of that Ádheenam, Thillainátha Pillai had come to discuss some matters with me. "Proposing to anoint your colleague Thiruvávaduthurai Âdheenam Vidwán Árumuga Thambirán as the Junior Head of the Mutt, we had gone to Thiruvávaduthurai. The Sannidánam gave his consent. We have come here to convey this happy news to you." I expressed my profound happiness. "I am indeed filled with boundless joy. It is so good that scholars are being appointed as Heads of Mutt. Árumuga Thambirán is a fine scholar. I am proceeding to the Mutt to get a Pátthuppáttu edition printed. This good news gives me encouragement. I feel that your effort and my effort would meet with success."

Ambalavána Desikar's Help:

I took leave of my father and other friends and reached Thiruvávaduthurai. The Ádheenam Head Ambalávána Desikar expressed joy on learning about my effort, gave me words of encouragement, gave me a sum of sixty rupees and sent me on to Madrás.

The next day Krishna Iyer and I arrived at Madrás and stayed in Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow. He had then gone to Allahabad. I left all the luggage in the bungalow and went out to see my friends. I met Therazhundur Rájagopálácháriár, informed him of my project and sought his help in fixing a suitable printing press. He advised that we may fix Drávida Rathnákará Printing Press, which had earlier printed Chinthámani. I endorsed the idea. On looking at the manuscript, the head of the printing press told me,

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"This involves more work than Chinthámani. It would cost more." As the press had done a good job in printing Chinthámani, I agreed to this proposal.

My Lodging:

I was staying in Rámasámi Mudaliár's bungalow, taking my meals in a home in Purasaippākkam and was walking to the printing press in Avadánam Páppaiyer Street. I found this arrangement very taxing. So I rented a room in the same house where I was boarding; this helped me review the proof during the nights. A student by name Kadhirámangalam Subramania Iyer who had rented a room in that house had suggested this earlier and also made necessary arrangements.

As I had not till then seen a complete original text of *Patthuppáttu*, I was checking up if manuscripts might be available in the houses of other scholars. I remembered the name of a distinguished scholar.

Annásámi Upádyáyar's House:

Years ago a great scholar by name Thiruvambala Thinnamudham Pillai lived in Mylapore. He was a disciple of Thirunelveli Ambalavána Kaviráyar; deeply versed in ancient Tamil texts; during his young days my revered teacher Pillaivál had learnt some texts from this scholar. Pillaivál had mentioned to me that many palmleaf manuscripts were available with Thinnamudham Pillai.

On recollecting this information I started finding out the location of that scholar's house in Mylapore and ascertaining information about his descendants. My attempt drew a blank. Those days a monk by name Saravana Sámiyár lived in the Mylapore Thiruvannámalai Mutt. The Jáfna savant Sri Árumuga Návalar had praised him as 'Saravana Sámi-

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yár, the Lion of Public Oration.' He was a respected Tamil scholar, had matchless expertise in traditional medicine. I had heard people say that he could provide some valuable information. So I proceeded to Thiruvannámalai Mutt and called on that venerable old monk. He was already seventy when I saw him. But he was of strong build and bright eyes. Some students were there, taking care of him. As an expert practitioner in Siddha medicine, he was administering medicines to the sickly persons calling on him.

I asked him about Thiruvambala Thinnamudham Pillai. I felt happy when he told me that he had known that savant, that he had no sons, and that his palmleaf manuscripts might be available in the Mandaveli residence of Annásámi Upádyáyá. I went to Mandaveli and located his house. As Annásámi Upádyáyá has passed away, I could see only his son-in-law. I met him along with persons known to him. He spread out for me all the palmleaf manuscripts available in his house. I found an incomplete copy of *Patthuppáttu* commentary. A copy of *Thirumurugátruppadai* commentary was also available. I collected all those manuscripts and also a few small books. I could also get a complete text of *Padhinennkeezh Kanakku* (Minor post-Sangam Didactic Works), though in a damaged condition. I found the text of '*Kainilai*' in that collection.

Later I obtained another copy of the Patthuppáttu commentary from V.Kanagasabai Pillai who was then a Superintendent in the Postal Department. I found all of them useful.

Commencement of Printing:

The printing of Patthuppáttu commenced. The work proceeded at a brisk pace. Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer was of constant assistance. Therezhundur Rájagopálácháriár also

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provided help during his spare time.

Conversations with Poondi Áranganátha Mudaliár:

I went to see Poondi Áranganátha Mudaliár often and had discussions with him. My association with him got strengthened during this period. Our meetings were enlivened by reciting Tamil verses and discussing about Tamil scholars. We would be engrossed in the discussions, even forgetting food.

During this period Mudaliár was composing a Prabandam called '*Kacchi Kalambagam*'. So, our discussions tended to dwell on the grammatical features of the genre of Kalambagam. I would recite many verses from the Kalambagam composed by Pillaivál as also from the Kalambagams I had learnt from him. Aranganátha Mudaliár was endowed with a capacity to identify the essential aspects of a composition and savour it. He had the acumen to absorb straightaway the essence of anything. He used to listen to the verse with evident joy, lose himself totally in their meanings, savour the elements of finesse and enthusiastically expressing his delight. This made the time with him meaningful and pleasurable. "If only persons like you were around Time would fly."

As the college vacation was drawing to a close, I had to return to Kumbakonam. I arranged for the uninterrupted flow of work in the press, left Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer to be in charge in Madrás and returned to Kumbakonam. Even if I had a break of two or three days I used to go to Madrás, review the progress of the printing work and return. I was greatly grieved when Purasaippákkam Ashtávadhánam Sabhápathi Mudaliár and Thozhuvur Veláyudam Mudaliár passed away during that period.

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Refusing a Madrás Job:

Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár used to write to me frequently. His letters were couched in prose and verse. In one of his letters he had written, "If you take up a job in Madrás Presidency College it would help progress your publication work. You can have access to many conveniences. It would also make me happy. If you agree I would try to follow up the matter." I was well aware of Mudaliár's influence. If he set his mind to it he could easily arrange for my transfer to Presidency College. I also had a desire to move to Madrás. My stay in Madrás would also be very helpful in my publication work. With my base in Kumbakonam I could not ensure desirable level of progress in the publication work at Madras. Therefore, I initially thought that god's grace was operating through Aranganátha Mudaliár. But the thought that this arrangement might adversely affect my association with Thiruvávaduthurai made me change my mind. At the same time I recalled the words of Subramania Desikar when he sent me to Kumbakonam. " In due course you should go to Madrás and shine further in the place made illustrious by scholars like Mahálinga Iyer and Visága Perumál Iyer". I thought that the time has come for the fulfilment of his prophesy.

I read out to my father the letter from Aranganátha Mudaliár. He replied: "Good. But can I get the daily Káveri bath in Madrás? I don't travel by train. In my old age I am not inclined to move away from the Káveri banks." His words set at rest my wavering thoughts. I took a decision. "Taking into account my father's advanced years it is necessary for me to continue here," I wrote to Mudaliár. This occurred during early March 1889.

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When I visited Madrás during the April vacation, I explained to Mudaliár my father's position. He saw the point. During his visit Aranganátha Mudaliár showed me the *Kacchi Kalambagam* verses composed by him. I looked at them and stated my views. He accepted them without reservation. One day I met Thiruvananthapuram college professor Sundaram Pillai. We met at the Madrás Cosmopolitan Club; he read out to me and Aranganátha Mudaliár many portions of the play composed by him by name *Manonmaneeyam*.

Publication Accomplished:

Realizing the value of Patthuppáttu, Rajagopálácháriár suggested appending an alphabetical glossary of rare words and phrases and demonstrated with the help of a cabinet he had brought along how such glossaries and indexes can be prepared. I noted the ease with which such an alphabetical index could be constructed and ordered two such cabinets to be made for me. Ever since, the compilation of indexes became an easy matter.

By the grace of god the printing of *Patthuppáttu* was accomplished in June 1889. I was immensely satisfied that the work was completed in a space of six months.

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109. RESEARCH WORK IN SILAPPADHIKÁRAM

The Patthuppáttu publication contained the following elements: introduction, the basic text, Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary, laudatory verses on the commentary, a glossary of rare words and phrases and an errata.

Introduction to Patthuppáttu:

The introductory part dwelt upon the excellence of the entire anthology, a history of each idyll, the efforts involved in locating the manuscripts and the names of persons who extended help in this effort; next, I referred to my proposal to print and publish *Silappadhikáram*. 'I have a keen desire to research into and publish ancient Tamil classics that had become so scarce. Ever since the publication of *Seevaga Chinthámani*, the patron and Tamil lover of Colombo Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár has been urging me to research into and publish the second of the five epics, Silappadhikáram, along with the commentary of Adiyárkkunallár. He had graciously written to me that he would provide all financial assistance required for this work. Therefore, I have decided to take up the publication of that work with commentary.' I included this statement in my introductory note.

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Thanks to the study of the commentary of *Chinthámani* and *Patthuppáttu* I came to know of the amazing erudition of Nachinárkkiniyar. But for his commentary I would not have known many rare and precious bits of information. His commentaries on *Kalitthogai* and *Tholkáppiyam* further highlighted his eminence.

The commentators are the benefactors who bring to light the greatness of a literary work. I could see from his commentaries Nachinárkkiniyar's great regard for the ancient classics and their authors, as also his disapproval of those who had made subsequent changes in those texts. I am of the view that he is one of the great benefactors in the cause of Tamil development. In the Introduction to Patthuppáttu I had not separately dwelt upon his life history. But, I had included a laudatory verse on him at the end of the introduction. It is as follows:

"*Evanála váyinidai yamudhalá yudaiyanena*
Iyambap petron
Evanpandaip panuvalpala viravádhu nilavurai
Ezhudhi yeendhon
Evanparama vubagári yevanachi nárkkinian
Enumpae rálan
Avan pádha virupoedhu meppodhu malargavena
Thagatthu manno."

(Adored is he
As the one who has
Bestowed nectar
In the mouth of riddlesome poison
Who has breathed life
Into ancient classics
With commentaries
Wholesome and lucid

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Chevvae thamizhi nilakkanatthaich
cheppi yaruli yoppillá
Ádhich changath thidaimaeya ladaná vemmán
thamizhp parama....
Ásá nenba dharindhadaindhae
nakatrá dhalittha ninkadanae
Sádhip paimpot raruvádhi thazhaippa
vorumáp perumudhalaith
Thadindhae yarimun northuyaran
thanappa varimá mugatrolaitthoi
Thádhir polipoon cholaikalun chalacha
malarneer vávigalun
Thazhaikkum valamá rilandhainagarth
Thandapánip perumánae."

(I come unto you
In full knowledge
You indeed are
The greatest Tamil mentor
Who taught Tamil grammar
To the immortal Agastya
Deified as a saint,
Who presided over
The unique Tamil Sangam.
Come have I beseeching
Duty-bound you are to accept me.
You're the one
Who felled the lion
Dispelling the worries
Of the ancients of Art
Who quelled the Allegator
To flourish as pristine tree of gold.
O Lord Dandapáni Perumál
Of fecund Ilanthai

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Rich with ponds carpeted with flowers
And groves choking
With flowers full of golden pollen dust!)

I have heard Gopálakrishna Bharathiár and Vaiyai Rámasámi Iyer say that one should be well versed in music to compose Keerthanás. I had some knowledge of how to combine the *Pallavi* (Theme), and *Anupallavi* (Counter-theme), how to integrate the meanings of Charanam(Refrain) and Pallavi, and how to put together the various parts of Charanam. I had come to kknow these aspects through them and also on the basis of my own experience. I then got an opportunity to compose Keerthanás by utilizing these aspects. I composed Keerthanás in *Surutti, Sahána, Senchurutti* and *Dwajavanthi* rágás. Here is a part of a Keerthaná in Dwajavanthi rágá.

Pallavi

Unaimara vádha oruvaram adiyenuk
Kuvandharul purindhidu váye

Anupallavi

Nanaimalarp pozhirsendhil nagari
lezhundharuli
Nambu madiyavark kinba marulpuri
Nádha parasuga bodha vanudhinam (Unai)

Charanam

Ulavum pasumayilu munadhu thiruvuruvum
Ozhivindri ninaippadhen nálo – thunbam
Palavum payuriyamainthu pulanukku yándrondu
Panni chelumadimai yálo – valam
Kulavum purangirith thaenae – sura
Kulangalaik káttharul voenae – engum
Nilavum paramporull neeyen rarindhathondar

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Niraindha pazhaniyil uraindha gurupára
Dheepa manindhapra dháya suravara (Unai)

Pallavi

Grant me but one boon, O Lord!
Never ever to forget your divine face!

Anupallavi

In Senthil town
You rise each morn
Amid groves of honeyed flowers
And bestow benign grace
On throngs of devotees,
O Lord of Heavenly Bliss!

Charanam

Lord!
To think ceaselessly
Of the prancing peacock
And your form of allure,
Am I to struggle
As slave to five senses
Heaping sufferings aplenty?
O Honey of fertile Paran Kundram!
O Benign Protector of Devas!
O Supreme Guru of Palani
Thronging with devotees
In awe of your might
And of your Omnipresence!
O Highest of the High!
O Abode of Divine Light!)

I read out all the Keerthanás to my father and got his endorsement. Kumárasámi Chettiár was very happy on receipt of the verses and the Keerthanás. These were later

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printed and published by me at Kumbakonam in 1881.

Reviews:

On receipt of Patthuppáttu, Pálaikkádu Municipal Chairman Rāo Bahadur Pa.Ai.Chinnasámi Pillai wrote a detailed review in the Madrás Hindu newspaper under a pseudonym 'Historicus'. It was published on 13.3.1890. Thiruvanandapuram professor P.Sundaram Pillai wrote a review in Madrás Christian College journal. All these generated a respect for Patthuppáttu among Tamil enthusiasts. Many of them wrote to me urging me that I should publish similar Tamil classics. Such laudatory letters gave a new impetus for my Silappadhikáram research, but the palmleaf manuscripts did not match this enthusiasm. Firstly I had a copy of Silappadhikáram text and commentary given to me by Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. Subsequently I managed to get Pillaivál's own copies of the main text and commentary. I already had Thyágarása Chettiár's copy. I had also collected a few other copies. Notwithstanding all these, there were many hurdles to my research.

Silappadhikáram Commentaries:

I examined in detail all the manuscripts available with me. Adiyárkku Nallár commentary was a veritable ocean. It contained references to many works encompassing three facets of Tamil: Poetry, Music and Drama, and also works on '*Mani Illakkiyam*' or Gemmology and '*Yoga*'. I found one good quality in his commentary which was absent in Nachinárkkiniyar's. He clearly states not only the name of the book he quotes from; in fact, in some places, he provides relevant information in respect of those works themselves. I can hardly describe the kind of trouble I had to go through in searching and identifying the names of the works and of the authors in respect of quotations included in

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Nachinárkkiniyar's commentary. Adiyárkku Nallár spared me that trouble. Those involved in research can well appreciate the value of such assistance.

Silappadhikáram is divided into thirty cantos. I could not get Adiyárkku Nallár's commentary in respect of eleven of them including *Kánal Vari* (The Seventh Canto) and '*Vazhakkurai Kádhai*'(Twentieth Canto). There is a glossary covering the entire Silappadhikáram. My friend Rajagopálácháriár of Therazhundoor had given me a copy. It was a very old and damaged copy. I could discern from some pointers that it predated Adiyárkku Nallár commentary. But it was very difficult for me to determine the meaning and the text, with that copy. While so, a glossary helped me understand some parts of Adiyárkku Nallár commentary.

Missing Portions:

Adiyárkku Nallár has stated at one point in his commentary that 'we shall deal with this in detail in '*Kánal Vari*'; in another place he has written that 'we have already explained this under '*Áni*'. Reading these I could conclude that he had commented on Kánal Vari also. In other places he states 'we shall deal with this in detail in *Azhalpadu* canto. And we shall dwell on this in detail in *Katturai* canto'. It was therefore evident that he had written commentaries on later cantos also. On this basis I decided that I should again continue my search for other copies of Silappadhikáram.

While on one hand the commentary with me was part incomplete, the portions dealing with music and drama contained terms not extant in our days.

I was afraid that it would take a long time to reconstruct those parts. I felt disheartened that I had to face one

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problem or the other at every turn.

Letters to Friends:

Hoping to search in areas not covered by my earlier journeys, I thought of Salem as a potential area and wrote to Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. "Tamil manuscripts may be available in the Salem area. I am not able to access commentaries on the latter portions of Silappadhikáram. I understand that scholars such as Sokkappa Návalar, who had written commentary on *Thanjaivánan Kovai* had lived in Salem. Could you check up and tell me if their descendants are still there. A search in their homes may yield some results. I seek your help in this regard."

I wrote to Appá Pillai, an important official in Kundrakkudi Mutt, that Tamil palmleaf manuscripts may be available in Sivagangai area; if he could identify places where those manuscripts were likely to be available I would make a visit to Sivagangai.

During that period Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár had gone to London in connection with his son's studies. He wrote to me from London. He had mentioned in his letter that at the end of his stay in London he planned to visit France and Germany, that there were very good libraries there and that many palmleaf manuscripts from India were available there. I immediately wrote to him to check up about the availability of Silappadhikáram text and commentary.I got a favourable letter from Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. At one point I embarked on a pilgrimage to Salem in search of more Silappadhikáram manuscripts. ◈

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110. FRUITLESS TRAVELS

On the way to Salem I got down at Thiruchirapalli and searched for manuscripts in a few places there. With the assistance of Pattábiráma Pillai I could visit the houses of a few scholars. S.P.G.College Tamil pundit Annásámi Pillai had copies of Puratthirattu and *Veera Sozhiyam* commentary. I found portions in the Veerasozhiyam manuscript which were missing in the printed version of *Puratthirattu*.

During my initial search for manuscripts I would not show much interest in palmleaf copies of books already available in printed form. I realized during my subsequent research that palmleaf copies were very useful in correcting errors in printed books, in the emendation of readings and in dealing with textual variations. Therefore, since then, I started collecting palmleaf manuscripts in respect of printed books also, and treasured them carefully for study and research. I got a copy of Puratthirattu from Annásámi Pillai.

Varaganeri:

Later I went to Varakaneri near Thiruchiráppalli and went to the house of a dignitary by name Sabarimuthá Pillai, a former student of Pillaivál. I collected a few books which I found to be of interest. Some manuscripts were available with National High School Tamil pundit Árumuga Nynár. I looked at them. I found a few of the *Pathinenn-*

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keezhkkanakku works. I searched in a few other places too. Nowhere were Silappadhikáram copies available. I got a few rare Prabandams from Vidwán Subramania Iyer living in a hamlet near Thirisirapuram. I went to Kulitthalai from Thiruchiráppalli and searched for manuscripts in the nearby villages. Nothing of value was available. And finally I reached Salem.

Salem:

I was happy that my efforts might bear fruit with Salem Rámasámy Mudaliár's help. When I enquired about the descendents of Sokkappa Návalar, I came to know of one Sabhápathi Mudaliár. I went to his house. As expected, many old palmleaf manuscripts were available there. I eagerly turned the leaves. Most of the manuscripts were damaged, broken, split across the middle or falling apart. I could not get a single piece of any value to me. But I could get the entire *Kamba Rámáyanam*, each of the seven cantos in separate bundles.

There was a Siddha medical practitioner by name Árumugam Pillai in Sooramangalam, part of Salem. I was told that innumerable palmleaf manuscripts were available in his house, and I went there. Árumuga Pillai was very busy. He had a bright countenance. I asked, "What is your age?" He said he was ninety-seven. I was filled with astonishment. He looked only about sixty. I realized that he not only took care of others' health but took mighty good care of himself.

The Book of Agasthiyar:

He had arranged all the palmleaf manuscripts in a separate room in his house. On entering the room I could see that there were at least five hundred manuscripts there.

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"What are the old manuscripts in this collection?" I asked him.

"All are old manuscripts. There are manuscripts even from the days of Agasthiyar," he said.

At the mention of the name Agasthiyá I remembered the monumental grammatical work by name *Agatthiyam*. I settled down there asking him, "Could you get me that manuscript?" He picked up a manuscript and handed it over to me saying, "My family has been carefully preserving these manuscripts from generation to generation. These are of great value. You can't find the like of them anywhere else. "I opened the bundle and looked. The letters of the manuscript were bold and clear. On the top of the manuscript there was a name '*Agasthiyar Pooranam*.' I turned the pages. It was a medical treatise. There were many works attributed to Agasthiyar. All of them were medicine texts. I looked at a few of them, and got tired.

"Don't you have works dealing with grammar and literature?" I asked Árumugam Pillai. He replied in the negative. I didn't say anything and returned the way I came.

Págarpatti:

Then I went to a village named Págarpatti and looked at the library of a landlord by name Srinivása Naicker. He was a lover of Tamil, particularly of Kamba Rámáyanam. He had ten copies of Kamba Rámáyanam, all written some 150 years earlier. I kept enquiring about the places where the manuscripts would be available and continued my journey of search.

The Wealth of Sculptures:

On learning that the temple in Tharamangalam had very beautiful sculptures, and that old palmleaf manuscripts

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were available in some Saivaite households there, I went there. First I met the *Ádhi Saivás* there and looked at their manuscripts. They were mostly Ágamás and other ritual texts.

I went to the temple. I am at a loss to describe the beauty of the sculptures there. Each pillar had very large sculptures. It would take one day to fully savour even one sculpture. There was a sculpture portraying Rámá aiming an arrow at Váli. Nearing the Rámá's form I could see Váli's form. But, when I looked from near Váli's form Rámá's form was not visible. The sculptor had so dexterously brought out that Rámá had felled Váli from a place of hiding. I wondered at the sculptor's artistic finesse. There was another Shivá temple opposite the main temple. It contained sculptures whose value was priceless. All the sculptures bore witness to the artistic mastery of the sculptors. Outside stood an ugly screen of split bamboos. While the sculptures inside stood as living witness to the artistic excellence of our ancestors, the ugly screen of split bamboos symbolized the indifference and indigence of today. The door made one wonder if there could at all be anything of value inside. But if the seekers of truth ignore this abomination and go inside, they would be rewarded with the sight of sculptural treasure of inestimable value. When I opened the split bamboo screen it lacerated my hand. When I came outside after witnessing the sculptures, the screen hurt my eyes and heart. I lamented the miserable condition of today.

There was a circular tank near the small temple. Many carvings there feasted my eyes. The person accompanying me told me that he would show me something interesting. I started observing. He took a stone and threw it straight across the pond. The stone hit the opposite bank, bounced back, banged against the shore at a different spot, stroked

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thus three times against the slope of the bank and finally returned to the original spot.

"Whose work is this?" I asked him. "This is the contribution of Kattiyappa Mudaliár who was a State official in olden days." He replied.

While the visit to Tháramangalam did not yield anything on Silappadhikáram, I had the satisfaction of having savoured the sight of sculptural treasures. I went to a few other places and my search for Silappadhikáram drew a blank. In the houses of some Veera Saivás I saw parts of manuscript of *Sadhuragarádhi* compiled by Father Beschi. There is a proverb which says, "a cart in a ferry boat; a ferry boat in a cart?' I had been involved in printing ancient works from palmleaf manuscripts. What did I find there? A palmleaf manuscript version of Sadhuragaráthi already available in print. I realized how deeprooted in Tamil minds was the old habit of writing down things in palmleaf manuscripts.

Karivalam Vandha Nalloor:

As this journey did not produce anything worthwhile, I returned to Kumbakonam, disappointed. I felt that I could barely sleep till I somehow got hold of good copies of Silappadhikáram. I decided to go to the Pándyá land in search of manuscripts. It was difficult to combine the college job with the search of manuscripts. I should spend at least a few days at a stretch if I went to Thirunelveli area. As the college work would not permit me this luxury, I decided to continue my search to one place at a time. Accordingly I went first to Karivalam Vandha Nalloor; during Subramania Desikar's days I had gone there once. I came to know that all the manuscripts belonging to Varaguna Pándiyar were stored in the temple there. That was the reason why I chose

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to visit the place a second time.

I went straight to the temple and reached the sanctum of Lord Pálvannanáthan. Tamil lovers were familiar with the simple and moving songs of Varaguna Pándiyar. I stood in the sanctum and recited one of those songs.

Munnaip pirappin thavappayano
Muzhumariyá moodanivan
Ennak karutthil irangiyo yádho
Ariyen iravu pagal
Kannar págir kotraenir kaniyir
Kanindha kavi páda
Annap pazhana vayarkkaruvai ánndá
Ennnai ánndadhuvae.

(Isn't it the fruit of merit
earned in past birth?
Isn't it the pity
I am a mere ignoramus?
I know not.
To sing in your praise
Day and night
In nectarine stanzas
Suffused with sugarcane
Wild honey and luscious fruits
You blessed me
O Lord of Karuvai
Surrounded by fields and swans!)

I added my own prayer : 'Relying on your grace, I have dedicated myself to the service of Tamil. You must confer your benediction in helping me get good copies of Silappadhikáram.' Then I started enquiring where palmleaf manuscripts were stored. When I went in search of the temple

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trustee I met one of his assistants. I had heard that annual ceremony in honour of Varathunga Ráma Pándiyar was being celebrated under the auspices of the temple. I asked him whether the ceremonies were being conducted regularly. He confirmed.

"Are the palmleaf manuscripts of Varaguna Pándiyar kept safely in the temple?"

"I don't know all that. There were many old manuscripts heaped like haystacks mixed up with old temple accounts."

"Really? Where are they? Could you please take me to that place?"

"Why are you in such a hurry? After Varaguna Pándiyar's death all his property is said to have passed to the temple. I believe his palmleaf manuscripts were transferred to the temple as a part of this arrangement."

"I know that. Where are they kept at present?"

"I have seen them lying scattered like rubbish. Who knows to what age those accounts books belonged?"

"Aren't there any other palmleaves?"

"They were all mixed up."

I got irritated that he was delaying matters.

"Come on, let's go."

"Where are you calling me? They were wondering how to deal with those piles of rubbish. They finally dealt with them as ordained in *Ágamá* Scriptures."

I couldn't understand what he was saying. I asked him with trepidation, "What did they do with those palmleaves?"

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"As per scriptures such palmleaves should not be scattered indiscriminately. It seems they should be dipped in ghee and consigned to the flames of 'homam'. That's what they did."

"Há!" I felt utterly devastated.

He described the entire process with a cruel relish: "They dug a pit, raised a fire, dipped the palmleaves in ghee and consigned them to the flames as a ceremonial offering".

'Would any Ágamá Scripture prescribe such a course? If so, should not that Ágamá itself be consigned to flames as an offering?' I was livid.

In the olden days when old palmleaf scripts grew brittle with age, they were transcribed on fresh palmleaves and the old ones were consigned to a ritual fire. With the new copies already in place there was no loss in destroying the old ones. What perverse stupidity! How many rare treasures had disappeared due to this atrocity!

Ever since I heard about Varaguna Pándiyar's palmleaves wilfully destroyed by fire I felt badly tormented. 'Is there any salvation for this land?' I lamented.

I had gone there with a plan to spend two days there. They saved me from that bother! I went into the temple again. 'I seek your grace that such atrocity should never again be repeated.' I pleaded to the Lord.

"Sindhanai yunakkuth thandhaen thiruvarul enakkuth thandhái
Vandhanai yunakkuth thandhaen malaradi yenakkuth thandhái
Painthuna runakkuth thandhaen paragathi yenakkuth thandhái
Kandhanai payandhanáthá karuvaiyil vázhundhaevae."

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(I've offered you meditation
You've granted me grace
Worship my offer
Your floral feet your benediction,
Fresh flowers my submission
Heavenly bliss your blessing,
O Lord Father of Skandá!
O Father sanctifying Karavai!)

I returned to Kumbakonam empty-handed.

These two journeys proved to be fruitless. However, I continued my research wondering when the Lord's grace would help me get a good copy of Silappadhikáram.

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111. MANY OTHER TRIPS

During the summer vacation of 1890, I set out to the Southern Pándyá land in search of copies of Silappadhikáram. Ambalavána Desikar, the Head of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt had informed the officials of the Mutt branches of my proposed visit and directed them to extend all possible assistance to me.

Thirunelveli:

At first I landed in Thirunelveli with a view to searching for palmleaf manuscripts in new places; Kavirája Eswaramurthy Pillai was very helpful in this matter. I continued to search in a few places I had visited earlier. During the earlier visit, my attention was solely focussed on Patthuppáttu. Now, my focus shifted to Silappadhikáram. I managed to get one copy of the basic text of Silappadhikáram and one copy containing text and commentary in the house of Sálivádeeswara Odhuvár. In the second copy, the commentary portion was somewhat limited. Later I went to the house of Thiruppárkadanáthan Kaviráyar and to a few places in Pálayankottai. Silappadhikáram was not available. I thought of going to places such as Srivaikundam. I learnt about an Ádheenam named Sengoel Madam in a place called Perunkulam and that its Head was well-trained in Tamil. I thought of going to that Mutt and trying my luck. My friend lawyer A.Krishnasámi Iyer gave a letter of introduction to that Mutt Head.

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Srivaikundam:

In Srivaikundam I first visited the house of a Kaviráyar. There I found Vaikundam Kaviráyar, a man of eighty years. While conversing with him he recited many old Tamil verses. Then I told him about my search for manuscripts and requested him to permit me to look at the manuscripts in his house. With a wry smile the elder told me, "Do we still have persons in this day and age searching for palmleaf manuscripts? After the entry of English education who cares for Tamil? Who bothers to preserve old palmleaf manuscripts? It is all printed books these days!"

"How have printed books appeared? As persons like you had preserved the palmleaf manuscripts, they are able to produce printed books on the basis of those manuscripts. I seek your gracious consent to look at the palmleaves in your house."

"I have many old palmleaf manuscripts. My sons had English education and moved away for jobs. I was afraid that there would be no one after me to take care of these palmleaves. So I have been giving them away to whoever asked for them."

'O! what a pity I had not met him then!' I lamented. The old man showed me a few manuscripts he had kept for his personal reading. They contained nothing of immediate interest to me.

Perunkulam:

I took leave of him, reached Perunkulam and called on the Head of Sengol Mutt there. He was then playing on the Veena. He greeted me affectionately.

"We have heard that you are quite an expert in the Yamagam and Thiribu forms of poetry. Could you please re-

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cite a few?"

Here was a person who finds pleasure in music, the queen of arts. I was surprised that he was also drawn to the verbal gymnastics of *Yamagam* and *Thiribu*. I had lots of such stuff at my command. I recited many verses from Pillaivál's *Thiribu Yamaga Andháthis*. I recited complicated verses in the range of three upto thirteen syllables and explained their meanings. He listened intently and was thrilled. On learning about my mission, he helped me look at all the palmleaves in his possession. There were many *Prabandams* and *Puránás* as also printed books. There was one copy of the main text of *Kurunthokai*.

I spent the whole day there, receiving manuscripts and also conversing with him. He took me to the temple there and explained its history and greatness. I learnt from him that one Uggirapándiyar ruled there, and as he had offered prayers at the temple, Lord Shivá of the temple was known by the name Uggiravazhudheeswarar. He told me that Sangam poets such as Nakkeeranár had assembled there in the presence of that Pándyá king, the Thirukkural had its ceremonial Arangetram there, and referred to a place as the site of the Arangetram. As an evidence of this story he showed me the figures of forty-nine poets and of Uggirapándiyar, installed as statues. 'Whether those poets indeed lived there or not, we should appreciate the practice in these parts to honour Tamil poets, alongside the gods in the temples.' So I thought.

Árumuga Mangalam:

I had already obtained the palmleaf manuscripts of *Chinthámani* and *Patthuppáttu* from Kumárasámi Pillai, a resident of Perunkulam east of Árumugamangalam and a Tamil pundit in Thoothukudi Caldwell College. They were

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good copies. With a hope that when texts could be available in his house, I went to Árumugamangalam from Perunkulam. Kumárasámi Pillai's son-in-law Sundaramoorthy Pilai was living there. He showed me all the manuscripts available in his house. There were many ancient palmleaf books there. I got incomplete copies of *Akanânooru* and *Puranânooru* as also copies of the commentary on *Silappadhikáram* and of *Tamil Návalar Charitram*.

Sundaramurthy Pillai arranged for my meals in a house in the village agraháram. I went there and had my lunch. The house owner had lined up a veritable feast for me. At that point a story about the village came to my mind.

A Brahmin scholar by name Ándán Kaviráyar had come to Árumuga Mangalam. Árumuga Mangalam was a big place. The story goes that there were 1008 Brahmin houses there, and Lord Vináyaká's was one of them. The Vináyaká there bears the name '1008 Vináyaká'.

For some reason, in that large village, Ándán Kaviráyar could not get food and was left hungry. He was an adept in composing abusive and satirical verses. He was even being referred to as 'later day Kálamegam', a byword for satire. The story goes that he recited a few abusive verses on the line of 'Going to Árumugamangalam? Forget not to carry your food. My advice this is. Lend me your ears.'

The feast I got was totally at variance with this old story. "Ándán Kaviráyar had castigated this village in abusive verses. But I am blessed with a feast here with a spread that is new and delicious!" I shared this thought with a person who was having his meal with me.

"Yes indeed. Only with a view to erasing that stigma, the persons in this village feed the visitors with sumptuous feast." The person clarified.

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The Tamil dumped in water:

From Árumugamangalam I went to Thiruchendur, worshipped the Lord of Senthil, searched for manuscripts in a few places in Alwárthirunagari and returned to Thirunelveli. On hearing that some manuscripts were available in the South Street house of lawyer Subbaiah Pillai, I went there. Sri Subramania Desikar's brother and my friend Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar also happened to be there. He was related to Subbaiah Pillai. When I informed him of the purpose of my visit, he endorsed it for Subbaiáh Pillai's consideration.

"We had cartloads of palmleaf manuscripts in our house that had belonged to our teacher from Oorkkádu. They had all become old, brittle and broken. I was wondering how to dispose them of, as they were found to be of no use to anyone and was merely cluttering space. I didn't have the knowledge to find out what they contained. With the availability of nicely brought out printed books, I found no use in carrying this garbage. Some old women told me that it has been a tradition to arrange them like a small temple and set them adrift in the river on the sacred date of 18th of Ádi month. They suggested that I could do likewise. Accordingly I consigned them to the waters of the village canal on

Ádi 18th." There was no trace of remorse in his voice. I felt devastated. My profound anguish was similar to what I felt when I heard of the bonfire of manuscripts in Karivalam Vandha Nalloor. Some savants praising the glory of Tamil had stated that it braved the flames of fire and floated with ease in water. I felt relieved that those savants were not around there to witness palmleaf manuscripts were being put to torch and disappearing in water. Only we are left to bemoan this sight.

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"You are telling me that all the manuscripts in your house had disappeared in water. Was this action at all proper? " I asked him in a voice choking with grief. At that point Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar told the house owner, "When I came here once, they were dumping the last instalment of the palmleaf manuscripts in the canal. I was a witness to it. One boy was carrying towards the canal the last remaining manuscripts. I slapped him hard, wrested those manuscripts from him and placed them on the top of the wooden cupboard inside. Please go and get them."

The bundle was brought and dropped before us. As rats had conducted research on these manuscripts before me, many palmleaves had been reduced to bits and pieces. They were parts of a few Prabandams such as *Thirupoovanaináthar Ulá*. There were also bits of *Silappadhikáram*; I collected and secured them carefully. The writing was clear and free of mistakes. The more I saw them, the more I was lost in grief over the loss of valuable manuscripts.

Sirappadhikáram:

From Thirunelveli I went to Ambásamudram along with Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar. On the way we went to the house of a Saivaite guru (Abhishikthar). On seeing us at a distance, Abhishikthar went inside his house. He was about 70 years of age. His son received us, went inside, brought two wooden planks to be used as seats, placed one on the floor of the thinnai and the other against the wall. After the seats were appropriately in place, the old man appeared. Appear did he in full regalia - Árukatti and Sundaravedam jewels in his ears, a string of Rudhrákshá beads around his brow, and a similar string with a gold pendant round his neck. He sat on the plank with a ceremonial aura and greeted us. He possibly thought that he should not ap-

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pear before common mortals without ritual dignity. He was known to Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar and was also beholden to him for some help.

We sat on the thinnai. "What has brought you here? Many dignitaries like you often favour me with a visit. I hardly deserve this honour. What can I do for you?"

"I heard that you have many palmleaf manuscripts with you. I have come to have a look at them," I told him.

"I see. What are you looking for?"

"I am looking for Silappadhikáram."

"Oh! Sirappadhikáram? Should be available." He replied with some emphasis.

"Not Sirappadhikáram, but Silappadhikáram." I interjected.

"We should call it Sirappadhikáram. You are a young man. You may not know it." Kaviráyar cut in and told him, "Forget it. Please show the book."

"Is it that simple? We cannot touch it as and when we like. We should perform formal poojá to Devi Saraswathi, offer archaná to her and then only take it."

From the way he spoke I had a feeling he might not have anything worthwhile to offer. But Kaviráyar would not relent. As he was one of his benefactors, he called the old man's son, sent him inside the house and directed him in a tone of authority to show the book. He showed the manuscripts. There were ten or fifteen of them. They were only manuscripts dealing with Ágamá scriptures and rituals dealing with 'Funeral rites'. We quietly took leave and left.

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Nánguneri:

Next I went to the Vánamámalai Mutt in Nánguneri and looked for manuscripts. They were all Sanskrit manuscripts. There was a solitary Tamil manuscript; that too the grammar text of Naidadham. I searched in many houses with the hope of accessing a copy of '*Thagadur Yátthirai.*' It was not available. I went to the house of one scholar by name Kanakkutthádhar. He had removed the ropes from a number of palmleaf scrolls and bound a number of manuscripts with a single rope. It looked as if a rope was more valuable for them than the precious ancient manuscripts. Kamba Ramayana scrolls were mixed up with manuscripts containing accounts. I collected some isolated scrolls of Kamba Ramayana.

Kalakkádu:

From Nánguneri I reached Kalakkádu. There were two Saivite Mutts in the village. First I went to the Southern Mutt. The Mutt Head Saminatha Desikar was a good scholar and a person of good qualities. On hearing about my mission, he immediately went up a wooden ladder, picked up the palmleaf manuscripts from a wooden loft where they had been stored and placed them for my review. I spent two days there reviewing all the manuscripts. There were many Prabandams, Puranas and Sanskrit texts - some of them did not bear the title of the text. I filled in those names.

I got one old copy containing the full text of Patthuppattu. I was overwhelmed. 'How much I had searched for this treasure! It would've been of such great help if I had accessed this earlier. I would use it suitably for the second edition.' I accepted it gratefully.

With the joy of getting the Patthuppattu, I spent one more day there. I went to the temple here and worshipped

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the Lord bearing the sacred name of Sathya Vageeswara. In the great mandapam were pillars with twenty-one beams. A person stroked each of the twenty-one beams. I was astonished to hear the twenty-one tones in all the three scales, one by one. Manikkavasagar has said somewhere, 'Knowledge makes a stone soft as a luscious fruit.' I saw there the artistic finesse of converting stones into the string of a musical instrument, and was lost in amazement. I was told that the temple had been built by Veeramarthanda Pandya.

Then I collected all the manuscripts I had chosen and returned to Kumbakonam via Thirunelveli.

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112. A TEMPLE OF TAMIL

On return to Kumbakonam I started researching on the copies of *Silappadhikáram* I had collected. I reviewed the basic text, Adiyárkkunallár's commentary and the old glossary of difficult expressions duly arranging them in proper order. Of the three components the glossary was in a very damaged form making it difficult to study it properly. References to the glossary items in the Adiyárkkunallâr commentary lent it some value but I could not derive such benefit from the glossary. Nevertheless when I reviewed the glossary patiently, I found a few rare bytes of information not found in Adiyárkkunallár's commentary. Thereafter, I started scrutinizing the glossary more intently.

References to Music and Drama:

Silappadhikáram contains a large number of references relating to music and drama. When I tried to organize them systematically, I was amazed to find a large number of rules and verses quoted by Adiyárkkunallár. I managed to get books such as *Sacchapuda Vennpá*, *Thála Samudram* and *Suddhánandhaprakásam*. I reviewed them too. Whenever I happened to meet Mahá Vaidyanáthaiyer and his elder brother Vaidya Rámasámi Iyer, I used to share with them matters concerning music available in Silappadhikáram and these three other works. With their help, some of my doubts were removed. They were filled with amazement and joy that Tamil contained such treasures of musical knowledge. There was one Natesa Dikshidar in Kumbakonam, well versed in the art of Bharathanátyam. I gathered from them valuable information concerning abhinayá expressions, the

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gestures of the hands and related matters. I also learnt many valuable pieces of information from a Ráyar who was a renowned expert in *Bharatha Shástrá*. When they explained such details to me, I used to lament that the Tamils had not carefully preserved the texts dealing with these fine arts and their grammar. However hard I tried I could understand only a part of the information available in the Silappadhikáram commentary. I could learn from Ayyásámi Shástri, the then Thásildár of Kumbakonam, some aspects of Yoga and related matters.

Professor Julien Winson:

When I was involved in Silappadhikáram research, I received a letter from Paris during April 1891. It was from Julien Winson who was working as a Tamil teacher in Paris. It concerned my *Seevaga Chinthámani* publication. He had written that he had greatly enjoyed my Chinthámani publication and urged me to publish the other four epics including *Silappadhikáram*. The letter bore witness to his love and respect for Tamil. "If you have the grace to read this letter of mine couched in poor Tamil and also choose to reply, it would fill me with happiness. Invoking all the grace of god on you, I remain your colleague and servant". Though separated by an ocean, we became friends with emotional bond. I wrote to him enquiring if any copy of Silappadhikáram would be available in any Paris library. He sent me a prompt reply. In his letter dated May 7 1891 he stated, "I am familiar with about a thousand Tamil paper manuscripts preserved in our large 'Bibliothique Nationale'. Silappadhikáram doesn't find a place in the catalogue. There is one manuscript of *Manimekalai* in that library. As I had written to you last month there are many gaps in that copy. It has only the basic text without commentary. It is a palmleaf manuscript. I had transcribed it out in paper to be placed in

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your library. If you are interested in looking at it, I will be happy to send that copy. You can try to fill up the blanks and send it back to me."

My heart had been tormented at the sight of palmleaf manuscripts, containing our traditional treasures, being consigned to flames and flowing waters in Tamil Nadu. Against this background, I was filled with joy and astonishment on learning that the ornaments of Mother Tamil were being carefully preserved in a place thousands of miles away. I told myself that even if people here lose all the manuscripts at least these thousand manuscripts would be safe and secure in a library in distant Paris. As I was intermittently researching into Manimekalai, I requested my friend to copy a few parts of that epic and send them to me. He was gracious enough to do so in good time. As it was replete with mistakes, I decided not to trouble him anymore.

Thirupperunthurai:

My son Kalyánasundaram's holy-thread ceremony was conducted during the month of May 1891. At the same time, thanks to the efforts of Kannappa Thambirán who was the steward of the Mutt in Thirupperuthurai, the consecration ceremony of the temple there was celebrated in a grand manner. Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt Head had sent me an invitation to attend the function, but, as I had to attend to the arrangements for the holy-thread ceremony, I could not go there. While so, after the completion of the holy-thread ceremony, I went to Thirupperunthurai and offered worship at the temple. Some palmleaf manuscripts were available in the temple library. I looked at them but did not find anything particularly useful.

Kundrakkudi:

I went to Kundrakkudi from Thirupperunthurai and called on the Head of the Mutt and also my friend Áru-

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muga Desikar who was the Junior Mutt Head there. I met the Head Clerk of the Mutt, Appá Pillai and reminded him about my earlier letter inquiring about the location of Tamil manuscripts there. "Wait a moment," he said, went inside and brought me a manuscript. I found that it contained the main text of both Silappadhikáram and Manimekalai. I turned the leaves of Silappadhikáram; it contained the entire basic text. The copy was also free of errors.

"Where did you get this manuscript?" I asked him.

"There is a Kaviráyar's house in Mudalaippatti, a village nearby. There are hundreds of manuscripts there. I got this from there."

"Mudalaippatti (a crocodile haunt)! A strange name indeed!" I exclaimed. "It is now called Mudhalaippatti. The original name of Midhalaippatti has changed over time in the spoken language." He clarified.

I had an urge to go to that village post-haste.

"How far is that village?" I asked him.

Noting my eagerness he said, "Oh, quite near. We can go right now."

Midhilaippatti:

With the permission of the Mutt Head, I took Appá Pillai with me and went to that Kaviráyar's house that very afternoon. Azhagiya Sitrambala Kaviráyar was his name. I looked at the manuscripts in his house. The house looked like a veritable temple of Mother Tamil. He extolled the glory of his ancestors and also recited some verses composed by them.

His ancestors had lived previously in Oroor village near Salem. Those days they had lived under the patronage

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of Kattiappa Mudaliár who was connected with the renovation of Tháramangalam temple. Those days one zamindár by name Vengalappa Naicker had ceded Midhilaippatti village to an ancestor of the family, also by the name of Azhagiya Sitrambala Kaviráyar. That family had been living in that village ever since.

The poets of his line had received many gifts from the Sethupathi of Ramanathapuram, the zamindars of Marungápuri and Sivagangai and also from the rájás of Pudukkottai.

Kaviráyar was in a mood to recount his family history: "My ancestors had received elephants as gifts. Look here; this is the block of stones to which they tied their elephant. They also enjoyed the honour of travelling in palanquins. Look at this old palanquin reminding us of the glory of those distant days. The elders in our line have composed a large number of Prabandams. They had received many grants. We are now enjoying the wealth bequeathed by them. Unfortunately I do not have either their knowledge of Tamil nor their power of expression. A cousin of mine, by name Kumárasámi Kaviráyar lives in that house, to the west. He is a good scholar." Though he sounded very modest he had love for Tamil. As a descendant of erudite ancestors, he also had some practice in composing verses. A few elderly persons belonging to that family were endowed with that skill to a greater extent.

All the manuscripts in their house were well written. A manuscript bundle bore a note - '*Puranánooru* commentary, Silappadhikáram commentary. I was filled with the joy of a blind person suddenly endowed with vision. I turned over the leaves. The bundle contained only Puranánooru. Silappadhikáram commentary was not there. I started rummaging through the other manuscripts hoping that Silap-

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padhikáram commentary might have got mixed up with the other manuscripts. My search was in vain. 'It is my misfortune' I lamented.

I got one Prabandam by name *Thiruvilaiyádar Bayahara Málai* (Fear - quenching garland of sacred exploits) with commentary. I had read a printed version of a small book entitled '*Thiruvilaiyádar Bayankara Málai*, but with many misprints. I was at a loss as to why it bore a name 'Bayanlara Málai'. On noting the title of '*Bayahara Málai*' in the Midhilaippatti copy, my doubt was erased. '*Bayahara Málai*' meaning a Garland of Verses banishing Fear has got transformed into Bayankara Málai meaning 'Fearful Garland of Verses'. I was amused by this mistake. I learnt from that copy that one Veerabadra Kambar was the composer of that text. I was in no mood to leave that house.

"Please tell me of the places in these parts where more manuscripts would be available." I earnestly pleaded with Azhagiya Sitrambala Kaviráyar. "In the nearby Chevvoor there are relatives of mine, belonging to a branch of our lineage. You can find such manuscripts in those houses. Another branch of our line lives in Káraichooránpatti. As it is severe summer now you may find it difficult to go there," he said. I wouldn't have been as pleased even if someone had revealed to me the place of a buried treasure. I was filled with joy.

I collected from Kaviráyar *Puranánooru*, *Baya Hara Málai*, *Moovar Ulá* and a few other books and left for Chevvoor. Sitrambala Kaviráyar was the first of their line to have settled in the village. He had composed a *Prabandam* by name *Thalasinga Málai* in honour of Sethupathi. There were many manuscripts in his house. But, there was no copy of Silappadhikáram. However, there was a long

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poem in the Agaval metre describing the history of the three Sangams. I read and copied it. During this journey, I had occasion to enjoy the conversations with Appá Pillai. He was an adept to talk in puns, making the conversation interesting. One tended to forget the flow of time.

Marudapándiyar's Renown:

I went to Kundrakkudi from Sevvoor and informed the Mutt about the glory of Midhilappatti. I went from there to Siruvayal with the view to meeting the local zamindár Muthurámalinga Thevar. He had urged me a number of times to come and visit him. He had considerable interest in music, Tamil and Sanskrit; was also versed in Telugu. A Tamil scholar by name Rámalingam Pillai and a Sanskrit pundit Thirukkoshtiyur Sáminátha Shástri were the court scholars there.

The zamindár was genuinely pleased with my arrival and lavished courtesies on me. The people living in the villages around Kundrakkudi used to praise the generosity and the exploits of Marudapándiyar and had also composed verses in his honour.

Siruvayal zamindár recounted many interesting stories. "The mansion I am presently occupying was Marudapándiyá's palace. This gave another name to this palace, as Palace Siruvayal. Among the leaders of Sivaganga State, very few matched his fame. He assumed the leadership of the State out of his valour. He was a very pious person, and instituted special worship in many temples. Of special note are the many mandapams in Kundrakkudi. The holy tank of Marudapuri was renovated by him and stands testimony to his rule to this day. There were twenty one Tamil scholars in his court. There are many verses composed by them in his honour." As one overwhelmed by the learning, heroism

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and generosity of Marudapándiyan, the zamindár was waxing eloquent for hours on his glory. On learning about my proposal to publish Silappadhikáram, he offered to extend financial assistance and also told me that I could utilize the services of the court scholar Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer any time I wanted.

I took leave of him and returned to Kumbakonam with the palmleaf manuscripts I had collected in Midilaippátti and Sevvoor.

On reviewing the copy I obtained in Midhilaippatti, I could get clarity on a number of verses which had earlier been somewhat opaque. In many places the verses had titles. The more I reviewed the copy the more I became aware of the glory of Midhilaippatti. As I was intermittently researching on Manimekalai also, I realized that I could also get clarity on some aspects of Manimekalai. Keeping Manimekalai in the backburner I kept concentrating on refining the Silappadhikáram text. But for my visit to Midhilaippatti, my muddled mind would not have achieved peace and clarity. It was against this background I had registered my admiration for Midhilaippatti, at a later date.

"There are many holy sites in Tamil Nadu. There are many Sivá, Vishnu and Subramaniá temples. Midhilaippatti belonged to this illustrious list. It is indeed a hollowed site dedicated to the Goddess of Tamil."*

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* *Please see the Eighth essay 'Parambarai Gunam' ('Traditional Value') in my book 'Nán Kandadhum Kettadhum ('What I have seen and heard'.)*

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113. HRIDAYÁLAYA MARUDAPPA THEVAR

As the scope of my research and related journeys expanded, my Tamil family and the treasure of Tamil books also started expanding. I needed an appropriate space in my house for the safekeeping of the increasing number of palmleaf manuscripts and for the friends who came home to assist me in my research. Therefore, I rented a two-storeyed house at a monthly rental of six rupees; the house was at the northern end of Bakthapuri Agraháram where I had lived earlier.

The New House:

On moving to the new house I developed hopes that I could go on collecting new manuscripts, take lessons for many students, and enlarge my research with the help of many assistants.

When the holy thread ceremony for my son was celebrated, many dignitaries extended different kinds of assistance. One of them was Hridayála Marudappa Thevar, the then zamindár of Ootrumalai. For a long time I had wanted to meet and get acquainted with him. I had planned to visit Oetrumalai during my earlier journey in Thirunelveli area, but somehow it did not materialize. I realized that unless I made a specific travel plan to visit Ootrumalai my idea may not be accomplished. So a few days after my return from Midhilaippatti, I set out to Ootrumalai.

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Vikramasingapuram:

I planned a journey to cover areas I had not visited earlier in search of manuscripts. So I went straight to Vikramasingapuram. Thiruvávaduthurai Sri.Sivagnána Munivar, who had composed *Drávida Mahá Báshyam* on *Sivagnána Bodham* was born in that village. I thought I might be able to find useful manuscripts in the house where he was born. When I went to that house I could get nothing.

In that house I met the teacher of the local school. To my question he answered that he belonged to Kadayanalloor.

"Really! I'm so happy. Are there any Tamil palmleaf manuscripts in your house?" I asked him.

A Braggart:

"There were plenty of them but a person has taken them all away." He said.

"Who is that person?" I asked him eagerly.

"Kumbakonam Sáminátha Iyer has taken them away." He said.

I could barely control my laughter. "Which manuscript had he taken away?"

"There were so many of them. He has taken away the whole lot."

Evidently he did not know who I was. The friends who had gone there with me were lost in amazement. I persisted with a few more questions to see how far he would go in weaving his web of lies. He insisted that there were many valuable manuscripts in his house and that the entire lot had been taken away by me. I had to struggle to suppress my

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laughter. With a view to explaining things clearly to my friends, I started saying my piece.

"Without knowing my identity this person is heaping slander on me. I had indeed gone to Kadayanalloor. I had also searched in his house. But there were not heaps of manuscripts there as he claims. On reaching their village, I went to their house on knowing that it was a scholar's house. The person there told me that all the manuscripts were stored upstairs. I went up and saw. There were two or three boxes. It was evident that they had been left unattended for a long time. I opened one box and placed my hand inside. It was full of rat droppings. There were only a few bits and pieces of manuscripts along with those droppings, left-overs of the rats' feasting of Tamil manuscripts. When I retrieved the few bits and pieces of the damaged manuscripts, all I could get was an incomplete copy of Chinthámani. I picked it up. What could I have done with all the other treasurers, mainly rat-droppings left in those boxes! This is the whole truth of the matter."

Then I asked the teacher, "Where were you during that time?"

Crestfallen he said, "I shouldn't have said what I did. In fact, I wasn't here at that time. When I visited the village during a vacation, the people in the house told me this."

"It is as well. Because of the slander you had unleashed on me, truth has come out. If you had told some others they could well have believed you. I am glad that I stand vindicated."

Then I engaged a cart and moved from Vikramasingapuram to Ootrumalai.

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His Appearance:

As our cart was nearing Ootrumalai a small body of armed men came marching from the opposite direction. The person with me informed me that the zamindár was coming. I immediately stopped the cart and got down.

As soon as I got down I was greeted by a stentorian voice; "It is a great pleasure. I'm coming this way only to welcome you." I looked up. He stood in front of me dressed as a hunter. I looked around. He was surrounded by a bunch of respectful armed natives of the area. There were also many dogs. 'He has come with all the hunters' paraphernalia to receive me! Doesn't he rather look like some warrior of yore?' I was lost in wonder. My eyes were riveted on his appearance,, scanning him from head to foot. He must have been above forty years of age.

"Why so much trouble? I could've called on you in your palace itself." I told him with a smile. "Ever since you wrote to me I've been expecting you everyday. Please go straight to the palace. I would be returning in a while."

I reached the palace. They had arranged a comfortable place for me on the first floor above the main gate. Soon enough arrangements were made for my bath. Then came snacks and coffee. After completing all this, I went to the court hall at 8 O' clock. Immediately on seeing me, the zamindár stood up and courteously asked me to take my seat. There were four scholars with him. I remember only the names of two court poets: Muthuveera Pulavar and Annámalai Pulavar. I took my seat.

The Study Of Tamil:

The zamindár was engaged with those four scholars in the study of *Thiruvánaikká Puránam*. He used to write let-

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ters to me occasionally requesting me to give the meaning for some Tamil verses. Those verses were generally very difficult, comprehensible only to those who had specifically taken a lesson on them. 'The zamindár is seeking clarification on such difficult and obtruse verses. Has he understood all the other verses? Does he read them at all?' I used to wonder. When I saw him in person the zamindár reading the verses along with those scholars and regaling himself, I could gauge his avid Tamil pursuit.

One scholar read out a verse. At once Marudappa Thevar turned to me and said, " Awaiting your command." I was startled. I was overwhelmed by his modesty. Thiruvalluvar has said:

Ellárkkum nandrám panidhal avarullum
Selvarkkae selvam thagaitthu.

(*Humility is virtue universal.*
More of a wealth to the wealthy).

The zamindár was an exemplar of this virtue. Am I a great guru? An elder in age? In his words (with your permission) I observe his magnanimity and unbounded love for Tamil. 'Maybe the princes of the ancient times endowed with valour, generosity and erudition behaved like this!' I wondered and was filled with admiration for him. I started explaining the meaning of the verse. When I was blessed with such a space, time and aficionados, would there be a limit to my enthusiasm? I mentioned the theme, gave word for word meaning, comments on some special points and analyzed the structure of the piece in terms of five divisions of grammar. The zamindár listened with rapt attention. Two more verses were dealt with. It was 10 0' clock. The zamindár placed the book down and rose: "Today I've experienced a bliss as never before. It's time for meals." He

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said with genuine courtesy.

I enjoyed the midday meal, soaked in thoughts of Tamil. Whatever I saw was a feast for eyes. The men I met there and the officials there were impeccable in their behaviour. Everything occurred punctually and with precision. A sand glass had been placed at the main gate to indicate the time. Everything around was spick and span. Most of the officials were well versed in Tamil.

How he spent his time:

I admired the way Hirdayálaya Marudappa Thevar spent his time. He woke up at 4 in the morning. After completing the morning chores, he had a glass of milk and went out at 6 0' clock for a stroll with his retinue. He would inspect the elephant herds and horse stables as also the cattle shed. He would walk along all the roads around the town. All those roads had been laid under his charge. He had planted avenue trees on either side of the roads. The gardens were well laid out and cared for. On his return from his rounds, he would study Tamil books with scholars from 8 to 10 a.m. He would savour studying over and over again new books as well as ancient texts. The scholars in his court hailed from families of savants; had also composed literary works; had served as his court scholars over many years. At 10 o' clock he would go to the court hall and look after State matters. Then would follow bath and meals. At 2 in the afternoon he would settle down again for studying Tamil, and also to attend to State matters. After 6 in the evening he would grant audience to those who had come to see him. He would look into the grievances and complaints from his citizens. They would present them to him in a palm manuscript. He would review them and pronounce his verdict the next day. Visitors from outside always received excellent courtesy.

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The Temple:

He would visit the temple in the evenings. It was a temple for Lord Navaneeda Krishná. During the rule of Hridayálaya Marudappa Thevar, the daily worship and rituals were scrupulously performed. Lord Navaneeda Krishná was the zamindár's family deity. Though it was a small temple the rituals performed there equalled those in the bigger temples. Different rice preparations, sweetmeats like *láddu*, *ládu* and *jilebi* and also snacks like *thenkuzhal* were offered to the deity. They were all prepared in fresh ghee. One ládu was the size of a husked coconut. Thenkuzhal would be as large as a big sandalstone. It was a custom of the zamindár to distribute these *prasádams* to the guests who came from outside his dominion. Marudappa Thevar would have a regular darshan of the Lord every evening. Several professional musicians would be singing prayer hymns at the temple.

I had not seen elsewhere such orderly and efficient administration. Though it was only a small zamin he lent prestige to it by his efficient administration. I used to feel that if he had been the Head of a large country, large benefits would have accrued.

Extending Courtesies:

I called on the zamindár at 4 in the afternoon. We jointly savoured the nectar of Tamil. I spoke to him enthusiastically about ancient Tamil texts as also the more recent ones. I was delighted at the zamindár's sharp Tamil learning. He was not given to finding fault with anyone. The Tamil manuscripts belonging to zamindár Periyasámi Thevar were stored in the palace. I saw them, but did not find any of them of particular use to me. The daily bath in the Chitrá river, delicious food, the zamindár's words bathed in love and affection and savouring the Tamil nectar - all

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these combined made the few days of my stay there heavenly. Royal courtesies were lavished on me. It was not mere honeyed words; It was well and truly royal. The only shortcoming was that I was not myself a king.

A Reluctant Adieu:

Even if I spent the rest of my life there I wouldn't have got satiated, nor would there have been any diminution of the zamindár's effusive hospitality. But, was it at all possible? I had a job on hand and had to travel from place to place in search of palmleaf manuscripts. I stifled the pain of inevitable parting, recited ten verses in honour of the zamindár and sought his permission to leave. I can now remember only the fragment of a line

"*O valorous king of Veera Keralam Pudhur*,*
Be gracious to grant me leave."

He requested me to stay on for a few more days. As I insisted that I had no choice but to leave, he reluctantly let me go. He honoured me with a shawl, a few expensive pieces of cloth and money for travel expenses.

I took leave of him one evening. He then told me, " I have arranged a carriage for you equipped with a cook, cooking utensils and provisions. These would be at your disposal wherever you have to go." Touched by his gesture I told him, "It is not practical to take a cook with me to the places I visit and enjoy delectable feast everyday. It would not be convenient. It has been my custom to eat whatever I manage to get in the places of visit, with my main focus on searching for manuscripts. As I tend to manage myself in this manner as an itinerant, it would be next to impossible to take care of the carriage, bullock , cart driver, the cook

* *Veera Keralam Pudhur was the name of the zamindár's village.*

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and the associated paraphernalia. It would also come in the way of my main work. It would be enough if you could arrange for a carriage to take me up to Thirukkutrálam." He saw the point and arranged accordingly. I was scheduled to leave the next morning.

After getting his permission to leave, I left for my lodging. As usual, a person brought me a glass of boiled milk at 10 o' clock in the night. It was a delicious fare, mixed with honey and flavoured with saffron. 'Where am I going to get such courtesy and hospitality ever again? How to part with such an affectionate friend?' These thoughts brought tears to my eyes.

I woke up next morning. The cart was ready. I felt like seeing the zamindár again. I went and saw him. He was startled on seeing me. He asked, "What's the matter? Hasn't the cart arrived yet?"

"Everything is ready. I have no heart to part from Your Highness, but, service to Tamil is pulling me away. When I was savouring the milk last night I thought of you and felt profoundly moved. I felt a desire to see you again before leaving. Let me take leave." My heart was full when I spoke those words.

"We are also sad at the parting," He said with genuine affection. "Whenever you happen to have free time, please feel free to come and spend some time here and serve us the nectar of Tamil."

I took leave of him. That was the last time I met him. Fate had ordained that I should not meet him again.

Leaving my heart with Hridayálaya Marudappa Thevar, I reached Thirukkutrálam.

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114. PUBLICATION OF SILAPPADHIKÁRAM

When I went to Thirukutrálam, Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar also came there from Melagaram. On seeing him I got enthused to visit many villages in those parts in search of manuscripts. "I had been to Ootrumalai. On reaching Kumbakonam, I should start the process of printing Silappadhikáram. Before that I thought I would, with your help, visit a few more places where manuscripts may be available," I told him.

"Sure, we will," He replied enthusiastically.

Manuscripts of Prabandams:

I went to Chokkampatti and other places with him. Wherever I went I visited the houses of many scholars. I was sad to find many scholars languishing in poverty. I saw the charitable institutions established by zamindárs in the olden days. I could meet many persons who narrated old stories about the past Heads of princely States and also about many savants. I heard many accounts of the eminence of Ponnambalam Pillai who had been a minister in Chokkalingam zamin.

Later I went to Vāsudevanalloor and Puliankudi and searched for old palmleaf manuscripts. Puliyankudi had a large community of scholars. I was told that 'Poozhiyanku-

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di' was the old name of that place. I spoke to those scholars. They recited many old verses. They showed me the manuscripts in their possession. They were all *Prabandam* pieces such as *Pallu*, *Kuravanji*, *Kuluva Nátagam*, *Kádhal*, *Mullaippáttu* and *Thirumugavikásam*. These pieces did not attract my interest. When deep Tamil scholarship and exquisite poetic finesse were in decline, the scholars composed such Prabandams to feed the interest and excitement of zamindárs and managed to get presents. These authors were not interested in following the model of great epics and the traditional values of classical poetry. Jugglery with words and eroticism dominated these Prabandams.

Events in Tenkási:

Then I went to Tenkási where I went to a Mutt in which had lived a teacher of Adhiveeraráma Pándiyar, the author of *Naidatham* and other works. I searched in their Mutt and found nothing of value to me. I met a gentleman by name Subbaiah Pillai. He told me that he knew by heart a few old poems and he recited the following verse:

Ullár kolloe thoezhi chillena
Parundhu veezhn dheduttha paindhalai yaravam
Kádharu kavana theikkum
Theedhuru kalliyan kádiran dhorae.

(*The vulture zooming down with a whirl*
Catching the hooded cobra in its talons
The half dead cobra dangling helplessly
Seemingly like a torn sling of a catapult
Sans the pebble swaying uncontrolled

My man wending his way through frightening desert shrubs....
Am I in his mind? Tell me, O friend dear.)

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From the style of the verse it appeared to me that it could be a Sangam poem.

"Where did you get this from?"

"There were many such poems in the palmleaf manuscripts in my possession."

"Really! May I see those manuscripts?"

"My house is no longer in my possession. My palmleaves, along with my other property, are now in other people's hands."

By then I had got accustomed to nurse high hopes to find something valuable, and those hopes getting dashed. The verses recited by Subbaiáh Pillai and the information he had furnished initially kindled hopes in me that I could well be seeing a text I had not encountered earlier. I felt very sad on learning later that he had lost all his properties under debt burden and was living incognito. I felt sad more because Tamil treasures had slipped out of his hands, than for his losing his property.

"Does it mean that no manuscript is in your possession now?" I asked him in a faint voice.

" I happen to have just a few stray leaves and a couple of books," he replied.

When I requested him to show them he said, "I have kept them in the loft of another house. I cannot go there during daytime. I will bring them at night."

I got those stray palmleaves that night. I found six verses in them. I thought they could have formed part of an ancient text called *Sitrattagam*. Till this day I have not been able to find that book.

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Though I had got only a few stray leaves, I derived the pleasure of having landed a large and valuable text, conveyed my appreciation to Subbaiah Pillai and left. Though I visited a number of places around Tenkási, I could not come across any manuscripts which would be of use in Silappadhikáram publication. So I took leave of Thirikooda Rásappa Kaviráyar and returned to Kumbakonam.

The futile journeys that I had undertaken and the troubles I had undergone to remove the lacunae in Adiyárkkunallár's commentary were indeed arduous. I had visited more than fifty villages. These journeys were largely useless. I decided that I should stop further fruitless journeys and seriously involve myself in getting Silappadhikáram printed. I immediately wrote to Siruvayal zamindár and brought Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer to Kumbakonam. With the help of Krishna Iyer and a few other friends, I began giving final touches to the different parts of Silappadhikáram for printing and publication.

Printed Copies:

Srinivása Rágaváchárivár, a Tamil pundit in Presidency College had already published the main text of Puhár canto in Silappadhikáram. He had titled the books as 'Silappadhikáram composed by Seramán Perumánáyanár'. In 1889 Sodasāvadānam Subbaráya Chettiár had published the main text and associated Adiyárkkunallár commentary of this canto. Both these publications were printed as Silappadhikáram had been prescribed as a textbook those days. Both the publications contained different kinds of errors. Chettiár had claimed in the foreword to his publication that he has simplified the difficult diction as necessary, expanded or condensed the text as needed, and to have written a paraphrase on the *Kánal Vari* as no commentary on that part

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had existed; the foreword also stated that as the 'Arangetru Kádhai' canto contained detailed rules related to music and drama in many places, he claimed to have prepared a brief account of these rules under this canto. It was, therefore, evident that the entire commentary of Adiyárkkunallár had not been included in the publication. Though he tried to publish Madurai canto, it was not accomplished.

Manuscript Copies:

I could derive no benefit from these two publications. The manuscript I had collected included fourteen versions of commentary and eight versions of the original text. I carefully reviewed all these manuscripts and prepared my own handwritten copy of the final revised version. Then I began to put together the other sections that should form part of the book. My growing research experience related to the publication of ancient classical Tamil works and my knowledge of ancient Tamil treasures opened new vistas to me. More than in Chinthámani I included new sections in Patthuppáttu publication. I felt that adding a few more sections in the Silappadhikáram publication would help future researchers. Such data was available in plenty in both the main text and in the commentary of Silappadhikáram. I developed a growing desire that I should record notes on the various books referred to in Adiyárkkunallár commentary. Another desire of mine was to classify the names of kings referred in the main text and in the commentary and to prepare an alphabetical index of the same. My research started fanning out into new areas. I wrote out a regular alphabetical index, gathered in separate sections and organized under separate headings, matters which belonged together; the students and friends who assisted me in this effort were indeed of great help. Of particular note is the contribution made by a student by name Kángeyam J.V.Subramania Iyer.

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Research Inputs for the Edition:

I collected all rare words and expressions and prepared an alphabetical glossary. Another alphabetical list was prepared of special kinds of information and data under the title '*Vishaya Soosikai*'(Information Index). In this manner I prepared separate alphabetical lists of kings, countries, places, mountains, rivers, lakes, gods, poets occurring by name in the epic and also in Adiyárkkunallár's commentary. A separate list was also prepared of the names of the texts quoted by Adiyárkkunallár commentary as well as an index of phrases, idioms and quotations whose source could not be traced. I also appended an explanatory note.

After completing those sections, I began writing a synopsis of the Silappadhikáram story, a biography of Adiyárkkunallár and notes on the works quoted in the commentary.

After properly organizing all these aspects, I began to write out my Introduction. In my earlier publications, I used to write the introductions while the printing work was progressing. I thought it would be a good idea to prepare a draft introduction earlier, which can be later revised or amplified, as may be considered necessary.

It was my desire that it would be useful to the reader if I drew his attention to the condition of the palmleaf manuscripts I had encountered during my search. So, I stated as follows in my Introduction: "Many of these manuscripts were so full of errors that they could not have permitted more errors to creep in. They bore witness to the fact that for many many years hardly anyone studied or taught them and that they had at all taken shape only due to the penance-like involvement of some literary benefactors who had transcribed them in new palm leaves and attempted to preserve them. There were conflicts between different manuscript

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copies which were mostly damaged and lacked meaningful linkage. The travails involved in examining these copies and evolving order out of them, are indeed heartrending."

When the Silappadhikáram text and commentary had been so shaped to be ready for the press, I informed this development to Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár of Colombo. Not only had he undertaken to bear the cost of publication of Silappadhikáram, he was also frequently inquiring about the progress of the work. He informed me that he would send rupees three hundred. While this was not adequate to meet the entire cost of publication, I accepted it gratefully.

Printing Begins:

I went to Madrás during the summer vacation in June 1891 and started the printing of Silappadhikáram. As I found the printing cost demanded by Drávida Rathnákará Press to be excessive, I arranged for the printing work to be undertaken by Vellayya Nádár Jubilee Press. Initially I stayed in the bungalow of Thavasimuthu Nádár, the owner of Jubilee Press. Then I moved my residence to the garden house of Diwán Ráma Iyengár. Ráma Iyengár and my student, lawyer K.Rájagopálácháriár arranged this accommodation and also necessary facilities. Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer was with me and provided necessary assistance.

As the glossary of rare words was incomplete and in a damaged condition I was wondering whether or not to include this in the book. On further deliberation, I decided to exclude it for the time being, giving priority to the printing of Silappadhikáram.

While at Madrás I visited the houses of many scholars in the city ..nd searched for palmleaf manuscripts there. Ten stray leaves of Silappadhikáram glossary were available in

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the house of Gurusámi Iyer, a great grandson of Saravanap-perumál Iyer. I collected those leaves and made appropriate corrections in the palm leaves in my possession. When I asked Gurusámi Iyer about the other sections of the glos-sary he stated that he had no idea.

Double Feast:

The printing work of Silappadhikáram was proceeding at a brisk pace. There was a distance of two miles between the printing press and my lodging. I would eat at 10 in the morning, leave for the press and come back only for the night meal. One day I returned to the lodging at 8 o' clock and began to eat. I was shocked to find that the food was barely edible. Foul-smelling ghee, tasteless '*kuzhambu*', and half-cooked rice – all combined to make the fare nau-seating. At that point I could hear the recitation of *Divya Prabandam* in the Rámá shrine of the Hanumán temple north of my lodging. Listening closely I could find that it was Perumál Thirumozhi. At once I washed my hands and went there.

It was 'Punarvasu Star' day, of special significance of SriVaishnavás. Many old SriVaishnavás were reciting hymns from the chapter 'Dasarathá's Lament', composed by Kulasekara Perumál. Some of them were already my acquaintances. They provided a convenient seat for me and continued their recitation. I savoured those melodious hymns, and forgot all about my hunger. My tiredness was gone. It was not merely a feast for my ears. Then followed a ritual offering of food consisting of a range of flavoured rice-items. A double feast!

As the vacation had drawn to a close, I entrusted the supervision of the printing work to Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer. It was arranged that he should be sending the proofs to me periodically. I returned to Kumbakonam. ◈

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115. SILAPPADHIKÁRAM PUBLISHED

On return to Kumbakonam, I attended to my regular work in the college and also looked after the work related to the publication of Silappadhikáram. I did not have adequate funds with me to meet the cost of paper and printing and related requirements. While my competence as an editor of ancient texts kept improving, my mind was reluctant to get involved in related financial matters. The printing of seven chapters of Silappadhikáram had been completed. Twenty-three chapters remained.

Help From Friends:

I informed my friends, patrons of Tamil and wealthy acquaintances, of my predicament. Timely help was provided by the Mutt Heads of Thiruvávaduthurai, Kundrakkudi and Thiruppananthál and also from Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár of Colombo, Sádhu Sehsaiyyer of Kumbakonam and many other dignitaries. This provided me the confidence to proceed further with the work.

Rámasámi Mudaliár's Demise:

The printing of Silappadhikáram was progressing fast. When I got to complete the work on hand, I thought of publishing other ancient texts. Research work on *Puranánooru*, *Padhitruppatthu* and *Manimekalai* continued in parallel. At that point Tamil Nadu faced the misfortune of losing my

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great friend and patron Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár. His end came on 2nd March, 1892. I was shocked beyond words on hearing the bad news. I recalled how I got initially acquainted with him and how his friendship had helped me get involved in researching ancient Tamil texts. But for his encouragement, could I ever have thought of publishing Chinthámani? Would I have realized the greatness of Sangam works and got involved in related publication efforts? In my profound sorrow I composed a few verses.

Here are some of them:

'Enbudaiyá ranbudaiya irámasá mikkurisil
Unbudaiyár nayasugunam ovvonrai yunniyunni
Anbudaiyár pallorum átrumvazhi kánáráith
Thunbudaiyá rágimanan chorndhidaven gagandranai yae!"

(Where have you gone,
Great patron Rámasámi
Who lavished kindness on me?
Leaving behind grieving hearts
Who are totally at a loss,
Ever thinking of you
Of your noble qualities
One by one.)

"Indraenum pálumenum insoludai yáyvairak
Kundraenum ovvá gunanudaiyái kutratthull
Onraenum unaiyanuga onnádhoe sárndhiruppin
Enraenum nirpiridhal emmai varutth idumoe!"
(Honey and milk
Merge in your sweet speech,
A mount of diamonds
No match for your virtues,

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No blemish can
Ever get near you.
Any day away from you
A stab of pain
For us one and all.)

Oorkkuzhaippán ponánen
ryalaivárum ponánip
Párkkuzhaippá nendru padhaippárum
thamizhenumun
Neerkkuzhaippá nenrurugi nirppáru
máikkalanga
Árkkuzhaippán senrái aliyudaiya
Annalae!"

(*Some lament the loss*
Of a benefactor par excellence,
Some sob at the passing
Of one who toiled for the world,
Some others grieve that
The one who nurtured
The ocean of Tamil is gone.
O the benevolent!
O the eminent!
To serve whom
Have you now departed?)

Mudaliár had been ever so eager to see Silappadhikáram and *Manimekalai* in print. I was denied the privilege of accomplishing it during his lifetime.

Meanwhile I visited Madras whenever I got spare time. When I went to Madras during the 1892 summer vacation, Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer had to go to his village; so I gave him leave. Thiruvazhundur Chakravarthi Rájagopá-

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láchárіár, Thillaividangan Vennpáppuli Velusámi Pillai and Subbaráyulu Naidu of Miller College provided assistance. Vai. Mu.Sadagopa Rámánujáchárіár, a person of sharp intellect and indefatigable industry, was largely with me and provided valuable help in comparing texts.

The main text and commentary of Silappadhikáram were about to be completed. As many friends insisted that I should edit and print the old glossary of rare words, I revised and corrected it, to be included at the end of the book.

Introduction to the Glossary:

At first I completed the Introduction to Silappadhikáram text. I had not written in detail about the glossary in the Introduction. I had simply mentioned in a footnote that a glossary had separately been prepared and appended to the book.

After the glossary was completed and printed, I thought it necessary to add an explanatory note about the glossary. With that the Silappadhikáram book would be complete. At that stage, I did not have enough funds to pay the press; I went to Viswanátha Shástri, a vakil clerk to the famous lawyer Norton and got the necessary sum from him.

It was Friday. I had a strong desire that I should complete the printing work of Silappadhikáram, get the first bound volume, savour its sight and then return to Kumbakonam. When I approached Vishwanátha Shástri on Friday evening, he requested me to have the night meal in his house. I stayed there at night.

With a desire to write the introduction to the glossary, I got the paper and pen from Shástri and settled down to write. I was tired, particularly after a night meal on a very hungry stomach; my eyes were drooping with sleep. I could

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not help lying down in bed. 'Oh! I've not written the introduction. Only if I hand it over to the press by 8 o' clock next morning, I could see the bound and completed version of the book tomorrow itself.' This worry enveloped me like a blanket. With the resolve that I should complete this work next morning I kept a candle and a matchbox ready by my side.

I slept soundly. Around midnight I suddenly woke up. The uncompleted Silappadhikáram book loomed large in my mind. I lighted the lamp and found it was two in the morning. As I had woken up half asleep, I had an overpowering desire to get back to bed. 'If I start sleeping now would I be able to wake up at 4 O' clock? If I happen to oversleep due to tiredness, the important work will remain incomplete and suspended.' While I was bothered by such thoughts, I did not have enough urge to settle down to write. At that time I was in the grip of overwhelming fatigue and was not left with any energy or drive.

My eyes were in the grip of slumber. I yawned with relish. When I looked up, a picture in the wall attracted my attention. I could not figure out whose picture it was. It was, however, evident that the man in the picture was full of energy and perseverance. That very appearance injected fresh energy into me. 'I don't know who this person is. What energy! What drive! And here am I sunk in sloth!' At this very thought, I picked up the pen and started writing.

Based on whatever I had remembered I prepared a short introductory note on the glossary of rare words and expressions. I read it again and refined it. Where is the question of falling asleep after that?

In the morning I asked Viswanátha Shástri as to whose picture it was. I learnt from him that it was his boss Norton.

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I mentioned to him about the bout of enthusiasm I derived from looking at the picture and the ensuing benefit.

On Saturday, all the residual sections of Silappadhikáram got printed. I managed to get a complete bound copy of the book and set out to Kumbakonam.

On subsequent receipt of the bound volumes of Silappadhikáram, I dispatched them to those to whom it was due. Many friends sent appreciative letters. I had sent copies to Rájá of Rámnád, Mu.Bháskara Sethupathi. He acknowledged the receipt of the book, told me that he would be inviting me to Rámanáthapuram at a suitable opportunity and that I should visit him without fail.

Data on History:

After Seevaga Chinthámani and Patthuppáttu started circulating in Tamil Nadu, an awareness of the great ancient Tamil literary works and savouring the same spread among the Tamils. When the publication of Silappadhikáram followed, the glory of ancient Tamil Nadu and the range of its literature and culture became evident to the Tamils. Scholars and researchers rejoiced in these new finds.

Silappadhikáram contains many rare historical data. The reference to the Northern Tamil march of King Senguttuvan, his conquest over Northern kings, and bringing with him the marble image of Kannagi - all these were received by the Tamils with pride and joy. Further, Silappadhikáram became an important source to determine the age of Sangam. Therefore, the book also attracted the attention of scholars involved in historical research.

The other texts which came to light through Adiyárkkunallár commentary became a veritable intellectual feast for Tamil lovers. It was only with this anticipation that I

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had prepared a separate section collating references to these books in Adiyárkkunallár's commentary.

Perunkadhai:

Of the information I gathered from the commentary the pride of place concerned the book by name Perungkadhai. Konguvell Mákadhai was one of the texts I had compiled based on my search. I had initially thought that it was a story of some person by name Konguvell. That manuscript, which had leaves missing at either end had quietly been sleeping in my box.

While researching the commentary of Adiyárkkunallár I came across the following lines,

Koothiyá rirukkaiyum suttriya dhá ga

Ká ppiya vá sanai kalandhavai solli

(*Order did he quarters for dancing women*

Organized discourses with epic flavour)

He had also mentioned that these lines appeared in the story of Udhayanan composed after the study of the works of Middle Sangam.

When I was browsing one day the manuscript of Konguvaell Mákadhai, I found these two lines there. I looked at it closely. I read what appeared before and after these lines. The name of Udhayanan appeared in many places. It came to light that *Konguvell Mákadhai* was indeed the story of Udhayanan. I also realized on a study of Adiyá rkkunallár commentary that the text was known also as '*Perunkadhai*'(Big Story) and '*Kadhai*' (Story). Till then I had by and large ignored that text; but now I started reading it with a new interest.

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In the notes I had prepared, I included all the information I had gleaned from the palmleaf manuscripts in my possession. While referring to Udhayanan story I made the following observations: "In the copy I now have, the beginning and the end of the manuscript were found to be damaged. Thirty-two sections of the first part (known as '*Unjai Canto*') were found missing. It was not clear to me how many more cantos had been there after the fifth Nirvána Canto and also the number of sections included in them. It can well and truly be said that this work is now being published only on the basis of a study and analysis of Adiyárkkunallár commentary." It was also my intention to make known that I had a copy of such a book in my possession.

Of the Other Books:

Likewise, I made the following observations in my note on *Mutthollâyiram*. "The book by name Mutholláyiram is presently not available. However, the anthology named Puratthirattu, while referring to a *Vennpá* beginning with 'Váriya Pennai refers to Mutthollâyiram as a source text." With this note I also referred to information about *Puratthirattu*.

I also wrote detailed notes on other ancient Tamil texts such as *Akanánooru*, *Kurunthokai*, *Pathitruppatthu*, *Pura nânooru* and *Manimekalai*. I pointed out that Perásiriyar was the author of *Thirukkovaiyár Urai*, in the following manner: "Many are of the view that Nachinárkkiniyar is the author of this commentary; I too had thought so earlier. But, it is not possible to assert that Nachinárkkiniyar was the author of this commentary, because of the following reasons: the author of *Prayoga Vivekam*, Subramania Pandithar, has stated in a number of places that the commen-

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tary of *Thirukkovaiyár* was written by Perásiriyar; in the palmleaf manuscripts available in the houses of traditional scholars in places like Alwárthirunagari, Perásiriyar's name is mentioned frequently as the commentator in the gloss of *Thiruchitrambala Kovaiyár*; it is of interest to note that there is not the slightest difference between them."

These notes of mine kindled the interest of many Tamil lovers. I concluded my introduction by saying, "I pray at the lotus feet of God Almighty that he may lavish grace on all the benefactors who had extended physical and financial assistance to me in publishing this Silappadhikáram and similar ancient texts." All these created an upsurge of interest in Tamil Nadu. Interested people met in different places and lauded my efforts and urged me to publish more such ancient texts. My friends also wrote to me individually, specifically mentioning the literary works I should take up for publication.

The publication of Silappadhikáram was completed and there was a torrent of requests from the Tamils that I should refurbish other ancient Tamil jewels and adorn Mother Tamil. I began rolling in my mind as to which ancient Tamil work I should next take up for publication.

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116. INFORMATION ON KAMBAR AND SETHUPATHI'S GIFT

One day many years ago I was engaged in a discussion with the Head of the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. At that point, a Srivaishnavá gentleman from Therazhundur joined us. I asked him about the special aspects of his place. I came to know from him that poet Kambar was born in that very Therazhudur.

Azhundur Mutt:

Thiruvazhundur was the original name of the place. It figures in a Theváram hymn composed by Saint Thirugnána Sambandar. The hymn refers to this place as Azhundai. The Srivaishnavá visitor told us that the holy name of the Lord consecrated in the Shivá temple there was Vedhapureesar. He further told us, "There is a separate icon in the Shivá temple by name Mahámadeswarar. The elders say that it is adored as a special and auspicious deity in that place." On hearing this I was reminded of a couple of lines from Theváram.

"*Azhundhai Mámaraiyor*
Vazhipádu Sei Mámada mallinaiyae."

(*O! Great Lord Mámadá*
Deified by illustrial Brahmins of Azhundai)

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I thought the Lord celebrated in Thirugnána Sambandar's hymn must have been this Mahámadeswara. It also occurred to me that the term '*Mámaraiyor Vazhipádu Sei*' implied that the place was reverberating with Vedá chants in the good old days and the name Vedapuri appeared very appropriate.

The coincidence that the birthplace of Kambar had also been sanctified in a Theváram hymn filled with a nameless satisfaction. The ancient Vedás and the matchless virgin Tamil must hve flourished side by side in that village during Kambar's time.

Kambar's Native Place:

Many stories and anecdotes about Kambar are prevalent in Tamil Nadu. There are also many stray verses devoted to him. Ashtávadánam Veeráchámi Chettiár had collated many stray verses and folk tales about Kambar and written an engaging history of Kambar in his work Vinoda Rasa Manjari. How this work scores in terms of historicity is, however, a different matter.

From the special laudatory verses attached to Kamba Rámáyanam and also from many stray verses, one comes to know that Kambar belonged to a 'Uvachchar' community of Thiruvezhundur, and his Vellálá patron Sadaiyappa Vallal belonged to Vennai Nalloor. There is a place by name Thiruvazhundur near Máyuram. It is an eminent Vaishnavite holy site. There are people who think that Kambar might have been born there. But the original name of the place was Thiru Indhaloor.

The term Uvachar refers to a community engaged in temple poojás; they are also known as 'Vachars'. In the manuscript I got in Midhilaippatti the author of Thiruvilai-

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yádar Bayahara Málai is referred to as Veerabadra Kambar. It appeared to me that the term 'Kambar' possibly refers to a community, that the personal name of the great poet Kambar had been left in time, and that only the community name had persisted. It was also possible that in the olden days they were engaged in setting up and consecrating temple pillars (Kambams) and this led to the nomenclature of Kambar.

Kadirvei Mangalam:

K.Kalyánasundara Iyer, a well-known lawyer of Thanjávoor and an affectionate friend of mine, built a new house in his village Kadirámangalam, and fixed the housewarming ceremony during June 1892. He had written to me urging me to attend the function. I already had a desire to visit Kambar's birthplace which was close to Kadirámangalam; so I included that in my itinerary and set out to attend the function.

Getting off the train at Kutthálam, one can reach Kadihrámangalam walking a few miles north. While in the train I happened to meet one Gopálakrishna Josier, a Kadirámangalam resident. He told me a few interesting tidbits about Kambar.

"Therazhundur was indeed the birthplace of Kambar. Vennai Nalloor is situated north of this village; that was where patron Sadaiyappa Vallal lived. Our village Kadhirámangalam is also linked to the country of Kambar."

"How? How so?" I asked with eagerness.

"Kadirvei Mangalam was the original name of the village. In course of time it changed to Kadirámangalam."

"What is the origin of the name 'Kadirvei Mangalam'?"

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"Kambar was in love with a courtesan. She used to live in that village. One day she mentioned to Kambar that she needed straw to thatch the roof of her house. On Kambar informing Sadaiyappa Vallal about this, the patron ordered the house of the courtesan to be thatched with ears of paddy, cut specially for that purpose. This is how the village got the name of '*Kadir vei Mangalam.*' (Place of prosperity thatched with ears of paddy)."

This story was then new to me. I had earlier heard of Kambar's liaisons with courtesans. This story bore witness to Sadaiyappa Vallal's magnanimity. Even before reaching Kadhirámangalam, benefits had come ahead. I was indeed happy and thanked the Josier. On reaching Kadhirámangalam, I heard the same story from many others. After the housewarming ceremony I went to Therazhundur. I was shown a place there by name Kambar Medu (Kambar Mound). They said Kambar's house was located on that mound. In the Perumál temple in that village, I saw the images of Kambar and his wife. I also went to the Vedapureesá temple and offered worship at Mahámadeswarar shrine.

There is a village nearby by name Kshetrapála Puram. Kshetrapálá was a holy name of Vairavá. Kambar's ever first verse has this line, '*Váittha Vairapura Mákáli Yammae Kaell*' (*Listen, O Great Mother Káli of Illustrious Vairapuram*')

Vairapuram occurring in this line must have been this very village. The Káli temple under reference is still there. People call it Angáliamman Temple.

Vennai Nalloor:

Then I went to Vennai Nalloor. It is also known as Sadaiyappa Pillai Village. It was a settlement of sixty 'velis'

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of land. There was also a temple. There was an icon of Vishnu on the banks of the tank.

"moetterumai vávipuga muttuvarál kanrenru
Veettalavum pál soriyum Venneyae."

(Huge she-buffaloes
Wallowing in the pond
Take nibbling prawns
To be doting calves.
And milk poured forth
Till the house in Vennai.)

Some persons mentioned that the 'Vávi' or tank referred to in the verse was that very temple tank.

I went to Shivá temple in Kadhirámangalam. While worshipping a Vináyaká idol, I noticed something written at the pedestal. It read 'Vennai Nalloor Pillaiyár'. I was told that the idol was in the road from Máyuram to Thanjávoor and that it had been shifted and installed in that temple in the interest of security.

I savoured the many stories and sights and reached Kumbakonam, soaked in the memory of Kambar. I had greatly rejoiced reading Kamba Rámáyanam ever so often, and I was filled with boundless joy on hearing many interesting details about Kambar's life.

'Kániálar Agaval' is one of the palmleaf manuscripts in my possession. From its study I came to know the Vellálás of Cholá land consisted of 64 Gothrás. Sadaiyappa Nainár Gothrá was one of them. The Vellálás of Cholá land also bore the title Nainár. I take it to be the Gothrá as Sadaiyappa Vallal's ancestors. I informed the Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt Head Sri Ambalavána Desikar all the information I

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had gathered about Kambar, his birthplace and other places. As a connoisseur of fine arts he relished my report.

Pinnátthoor A.Náráyanasámi Iyer, who had assisted me later in my publication effort, gathered from me all the information about Kambar, combined them with some other matters and incorporated them in his commentary on a Tamil text book he had published.

Navaráthri Festival:

I received an invitation from Báskara Sethupathi of Rámanáthapuram to attend the Navaráthri festival that year. I took ten days leave from the college, went by train to Madurai and travelled to Rámanáthapuram by a bullock cart. I saw cart after cart on the road, all loaded to their breaking point. Some carts were stranded on the roads with their axles broken under crushing load. All the carts were heading towards Rámanáthapuram. I could guess the eminence and popularity of the Navaráthri festival there.

Hundreds of scholars had come from different parts of Tamil Nádu and even beyond. It looked as if no dignitary of note from Tamil Nádu was missing there. The town was choking with crowds. Prices of commodities had shot up manifold. The tutelary deity of Sethupathi kings received ritual oblations with holy water filled in 1008 conches. The poojás were very elaborately performed. There were innumerable music concerts. There were also formal meetings of Tamil and Sanskrit scholars.

Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer did not attend the celebrations due to indifferent health; only his elder brother had come. I was used to seeing them both together as twins, and seeing only Rámasámi Iyer I felt like seeing a body without life. "Your brother hasn't come. Is he badly ill?" I asked him.

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"Yes. We must trust the grace of Lord Pranadhárthi Harar. I was also not planning to come. But Vaithi insisted I should. It is a place close to me. So I am here." He replied. They had made separate lodging arrangements for me. It is rare to have such an occasion when one can meet so many scholars all together. The scholars and friends lauded me for having completed the *Silappadhikáram* publication. "When we look at the list of works referred to by you, we feel overwhelmed. What are you planning to start next?" They asked me.

"There is *Manimekalai*; so also *Puranánooru*, *Ainkurunooru*, *Akanánooru*, *Natrinai* – there is a whole lot of them. I should think of publishing them one by one". At that point I had not decided which work to take up next.

I had then a good opportunity to get closely acquainted and discuss matters with Siruvayal zamindár Muthurámalinga Thevar and Pálavanattham zamindár Ponnusámi Thevar's son Pánditthurai Thevar. Muthurámalinga Thevar was Baskara Sethupathi's grandfather's brother. He promised to provide financial assistance for my publications.

Time really took to its wings during the ten days I spent there. I was profoundly touched by Sethupathi's hospitality, his gift of the gab and his legendary munificence. It appeared that he would have spent not less than two lakh rupees for the celebration.

Many scholars recited verses in honour of Sethupathi. I too provided my share. Now I am able to recall only these two lines:

"*Vinnir chirandhidu párkarar poeḷ virumbumindha*
Mannir siradhuyor párkara bhoopathi vázhiyavae."

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(*Upon the skies splendidly*
The milky Moon,
On the earth shines sun-like
Lord Bhaskara (*siva*) *Bhupathi.*)

Gift:

When I took leave of King Sethupathi he honoured me with two expensive shawls and said, "I would be coming to Thanjávoor district. I shall then converse with you at leisure and also provide necessary assistance for your service to Tamil. At the point of my departure, the court treasurer handed over hundred rupees to me to cover travel and other expenses. On reaching Kumbakonam, I showed the shawls to my parents and friends. They were all delighted. During my next visit to Thiruvávaduthurai I showed them to Ambalavána Desikar. With evident pleasure he told me, "This is truly a very expensive gift; an honour befitting your eminence."

"But for my association with this Ádheenam what intrinsic honour do I have?" I told him with genuine modesty, and asked him what would b the probable cost of the two shawls.

"Definitely more than 300 rupees," he replied.

"What use can I have of these expensive shawls. I am thinking of leaving them with the Ádheenam."

"What? Why do you say such things? This is an honour conferred upon you by a prestigious State. You should treasure them carefully."

"I still have residual worries and commitments after the publication of Silappadhikáram. I am at a loss as to how

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to tide over them. What would I do with these two shawls? This is an honour flowing from my humble service at the feet of Mother Tamil. So it is but appropriate that I use it for a cause." I told him.

Ambalavána Desikar did not quite like my giving away those shawls. Even so, taking my hint he accepted the shawls on behalf of the Mutt and arranged a payment of 300 rupees to me. I accepted the amount gratefully and got released from the post-publication debt.

With the joy of having liquidated the debt I started thinking of the next choice for publication. While I had manuscripts related to a number of works, I was then researching more into *Manimekalai* and *Puranánooru*. Of the two, Puranánooru had old commentary for more than half the text. There was no commentary for Manimekalai. Further, it was a Buddhist text. I could not fully understand the terms and ideas embedded in that religious text. Therefore I decided to take up Puranánooru as the next publication.

In the meanwhile, following the wish of Sri Subramania Thambirán, the Head Steward of Thirupperunthurai Mutt, I published the '*Sthalapuránam*' of that site composed by Pillaivál towards the end of 1892. I would have liked to provide notes and supplementary explanations. But,as the Thambirán was very keen that it should see the print very quickly, I published only the bare text.

Then I got immersed in a deep study of Puranánooru.

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117. PURANÁNOORU RESEARCH

On deciding that I would next publish in print the Puranánooru, I started thinking about my approach to editing. I was developing a fresh interest in exploring new methods in collecting information, collating them and appropriately using them in enhancing the quality of publication. But I had a handicap. Because I did not know English language, I was not able to savour outstanding publications in that language or to adopt them as role models for my work. I relied mainly on divine grace in studying Sangam works, researching on them, and then attempting to publish them in print. As I had no prior experience in the field, I explored different approaches to my research to make my research more inclusive and my publication more attractive.

New Methods:

One day K.R.Duraisámi Iyer, a history professor in Kumbakonam college, was holding in his hand a large-sized English book.

"What book is this?" I asked him.

"Bible." He replied.

"Is not the Bible a small book? How come this is so large?" I expressed my surprise.

"This is a special edition of Bible. In this publication they have classified different kinds of thoughts incorporat-

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ed in Bible and made cross reference to similar words and thoughts occurring in different parts of Bible. In the midst of every page this aspect gets highlighted. In English language this is called concordance." Saying this, he turned the pages of the book and showed me what he meant.

I saw numbers of various kinds in the cross-reference column. There were also the pictures of the compiler and of his assistants.

"What is the benefit of these cross-references?" I asked him innocently.

He sought to explain the matter to me: "The same matter gets to be mentioned in many places in Bible. And also the same expressions. By collating and reviewing them, the true significance of these matters and the precise nature of some words and expressions apparently emerged. It is also gathered that by this kind of analysis and review they were able to rectify some erroneous readings in the Bible text."

Immediately a new approach to Puranánooru research suggested itself to me. I realized that preparing an alphabetical index of the incidents and words occurring in Pura nánooru, and a close analysis of this data base would help me determine the appropriate form of the text. I embarked upon preparing such a list.

The Tools of Research:

If one should publish a text that is proper and substantially fault-free, firstly it is necessary to assemble proper tools of research. It is not enough only to assemble the palmleaf manuscripts. These manuscripts are not generally fault-free. We can see fault-ridden readings handed over from generation to generation. Most of the effort is directed towards finding out the correct text. It is not enough to pre-

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pare an alphabetical index of ideas and rare words. Many poets had contributed to Puranánooru. The verses composed by them also appeared in other works. If we look at those verses too, one can discern the favourite ideas of the poet and also his style. Such an analysis can yield useful pointers to refining the text. Keeping this in mind, I prepared an alphabetical index of the names of Sangam poets, and collated information of the exact location of their poems in the different Sangam anthologies.

One has to study and analyze the entire gamut of Sangam works to discern the underlying ethos animating Sangam literature. All the Sangam works should be considered to constitute an organic body. The entire body has a certain animating spirit. So a study of all the texts only can lead to a proper understanding of this spirit and tradition. Based on this approach, I prepared an alphabetical index of the entire body of Sangam texts then in my possession.

In short, a study of the whole gamut of Sangam classics became essential for my Puranánooru research. Although I derived manifold pleasures from this approach, it was also very exacting. It became indispensable to seek help from many scholars.

Those Who Helped:

Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer and Má.Vee.Rámánujácháriár were with me and provided assistance in this extensive research. Sri. Chokkalinga Thambirán* who was then studying Tamil texts under me, also assisted me in this effort. One Ponnusámi Pillai of Thirupperunthurai and a few college students also offered their services.

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* *Later (1919 – 1930) he was the Head of the Thirupananthál Kási Mutt.*

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The Elucidation of Quotations:

The commentators on grammar and on literary texts had quoted in their works *Puranánooru* poems in full or in part. An analysis of these portions and the rationale behind their citations would not only help refining the text but also throw light on the main thrust of the poem. To assemble such citations, it would be necessary to study all the commentaries and identify the portions where there were references to parts of *Puranánooru*. The printed works mostly did not contain indexes or other types of guidance.

In the palmleaf manuscripts it is difficult to discern the original texts of the cited quotations. The students used to interpolate between two lines of the palmleaf manuscripts the points of interest their masters revealed to them in the course of their study. Those who found their livelihood by copying manuscripts, included these verbatim notes along with the old original text and commentary, during transcription. It is truly a daunting task to identify these interpolations during a review of the manuscripts.

While reviewing the commentary, if I happened to know the source of a quotation, I would invariably indicate it underneath the quotation. Whenever I found quotations in the printed books in my possession such as the commentaries on *Tholkáppiyam*, *Thirukkural* and other works, I used to jot them down in a notebook indicating their locations in those commentaries. In the process I could note the defective readings occurring in those editions. Whenever I happen to use them in my edition, I stopped with using the correct form and abstained from highlighting the defects. This became my standard practice.

Such a research into the quotations itself consumed a lot of time. While a lot of effort was involved in classify-

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ing and listing these quotations, it was found to be useful in my work on many publications. The alphabetical indexes of different kinds I had patiently prepared over years, proved to be a valuable asset in my research work. Whenever I look at those collections, I tend to recall how much of time and effort of so many friends had gone into them. Those who read the final printed books would have no idea of the immense value of such compilations. Those who admire the beauty and elegance of a mighty mansion would not care to think of the foundation over which the mansions have been raised. The foundation laid with meticulous care and effort lies hidden under the ground.

Many quotations from *Puranánooru* are found in the commentary on *Poruladhikáram* of *Tholkáppiyam*. The *Puratthirattu* in my possession also contained a large number of verses. I used these sources to fill up the many gaps in the Puranánooru manuscripts with me.

Puranánooru consists of 400 poems. At the end of my research, poem numbers 267 and 268 were not available anywhere. The beginning lines of many poems were missing; so also the final portions of some poems; in some poems, middle portions were missing too.

The Commentary:

Some of the copies of *Puranánooru* with me contained an old commentary. There was no clue to the authorship of these commentaries. These commentaries covered only the first 260 poems. The commentaries on poems with number 242 onwards were partly damaged. The author of the commentary provides the meaning of words in an agreeable manner; where appropriate he has also attempted to fill the gaps in words; gives grammatical notes; mentions situations and themes as well as figures of speech and various

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tropes; and also quotes proverbs from time to time. Some of the sentences appeared inappropriate in the context. Certain points had also been refuted in some places. Taking all these factors into account one could infer that there was once an ancient commentary on Puranánooru.

Thinai (Situation) and Thurai (Theme):

At the end of each poem, the particular situation (*Thinai*) and theme (*Thurai*) are given; and also the name of the poet and the name of the person to whom the poem is addressed. It is interesting to note that Nachinárkkiniyar had made the following observation in his commentary on Tholkkáppiyam: "The *Thinai* and *Thurai* references have been made in respect of *Puranánooru* poems based on new works. It should, however, be noted that Agatthiyam and Tholkkáppiyam are the grammars of the Sangam Anthologies, and the aphorisms in those works should provide the basis for *Thinai* and *Thurai* determination." Notwithstanding this statement, the assignment of Thinai and Thurai as found in the manuscript copies have been in vogue over a long period. It appears that this was possibly based on the old *Purapporull* grammar called *Panniru Padalam*. This old treatise is not presently available. But I had with me a related ancillary treatise called *Purapporull Vennpá Málai*, both the text and the commentary. By carefully reviewing it, I was able to understand most of the grammatical norms concerning *Thinai* and *Thurai*. I could not, however, find any explanation of some of the Thurai elements.

Historical Information:

Historical information occurred in the comments on the names of poets and of the protagonists. This data is very useful in historical research concerning the age of Sangam. There were several discrepancies in these two kinds of

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names. I compiled and classified these names and started analysing the occurrence of these names in other works. This historical research was a veritable ocean. We are able to see one shore of the ocean; but this literary ocean was shoreless and rimless.

I thought of contacting experts in historical research to gain more light on these matters. I wrote to Ráo Bahadur V.Venkaiáh, former Government Superintendent of Epigraphy, mentioning the names of a few kings of certain places and related matters, and requested him to provide me data on these names. He provided me with some information on kings such as Athiyamán, Karikál Valavan and places like Venni and Mizhalai.

V.Kanagasabai Pillai who was working as a Superintendent in the Postal Department was keenly interested in Tamil classics and in the history of Tamil Nadu. He had compiled a lot of information with a view to writing a History of Tamil. Based on his research, he later published a valuable book in English entitled 'The Tamils 1800 Years Ago'. He was a friend of mine. He had helped me with some palmleaf manuscripts in his possession. He used to frequently enquire about the progress of my publication of Tamil classics and gave me encouragement.

The Word 'Thunjiya':

I wrote to him requesting him to throw light on some matters. Importantly, I referred to the occurrence of the word '*Thunjiya*' in the names of many kings mentioned in Puranánooru and sought the meaning of the term. The term 'Thunjiya' occurs in the names of '*Káriyátru Thunjiya Nedunkilli, Saeramán Kottambalatthu Thunjiya Mákoedhai, Sozhan Kuráppalli Thunjiya Perunthiru Mávalavan*. Contextually it appeared to me that the term 'Thunjiya' might

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mean 'who died'. But a doubt arose: why there should be a reference to death in a panegyric poem on a king? Here is an example:

In Puranánooru 34 a poet by name Álatthoor Kizhár sings about a Cholá King Killi Valavan saying in praise:

Kondal mámazhai pozhindha
Nunnbah ruliyinum vázhiya palavae."

(*May you prosper*
More than the millions of
Droplets sprayed by
The torrential rain
Unleashed by
Eastern clouds massive.)

At the end of the poem there is a gloss saying 'Álatthur Kizhár's song on Killi Valavan who had died ('Thunjiya') in Sozhan Kulamutram.' The poem lauds a king's eminence; but the gloss specially talks of his death. This is, of course, the notation provided by those who later anthologized the poems. It is possibly a literary tradition of those times to refer to where a particular king 'Thunjinár' (Fell asleep, meaning 'died'). The apparent incongruity got resolved in my mind after Kanagasabai Pillai explained this literary tradition of those days.

He wrote to me that the proper meaning of 'Thunjiya' in the context is 'who died'; he quoted Silappadhikáram and Thaeváram in support of his conclusion. He also referred to the prevalence of this practice in other parts: "It was a traditional practice amongst Sámuthri Kings of Calicut and Trivándrum to specifically mention the place and time of death of a king along with his name." Finally he wrote: " When this wonderful Puranánooru is published, the Tamils would get to know many amazing bits of information. This

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could promote interest in a study of Tamil Nádu History. You should publish the book in good time."

So it was that I collected different kinds of information and interesting notes. I subjected them to review and research, refined and finalized the matter to be included in the Puranánooru book. I set out to Madrás to hand over the material for printing.

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118. THREE SAD EVENTS

The printing of *Puranánooru* started in V.N. Jubilee Press in January 1893. As usual, I stayed in Rámáyyangár Garden and looked after the printing. I could not get the assistance of Thirumánoor Krishna Iyer for this publication work. Vai.Mu.Sadagopa Rámánujáchériár provided assistance to me. He had a lot of expertise in publication matters. He could handle the work of two or three persons. So the publication work progressed very well.

Sadásiva Pillai's Copy:

One day I went to see Sadásiva Pillai who was looking after Árumuga Návalar's Press in Madrás. He mentioned to me that he had a copy of *Puranánooru* and also sent it to me through a friend. It contained only the basic text, that too not in its entirety. It had verses from 267 to 369. For me, who treasures even a single new verse, that copy was useful in many ways.

Eighteen formes of *Puranánooru* had been printed. As the college was about to reopen, I arranged for the proofs to be sent to Kumbakonam and left. I went via Salem, seeing different places en route. I was interested in visiting places mentioned in *Puranánooru* and inquired about their history and background. When I visited Karuvoor, a few lawyers there informed me that some of their clients had names ending with '*Vallals*' (Great benefactors). I thought that the

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persons in Karuvoor with the surname of Vallal could well be the descendants of the Seven Great Vallals.

Ve.Pa.Subramania Mudaliár:

After my return to Kumbakonam, I completed the Index of *Puranánooru*. At that time, Srimán Rao Saheb Ve.Pa. Subramania Mudaliár was the Superintendent of Vetenary Services in that region. I got acquainted with him. His love of Tamil and passion for *Kamba Rámáyanam* brought us closer. Whenever he camped near Kumbakonam, I used to meet him and have lively discussions with him. He would also recite verses composed by him. I was filled with amazement that an English-educated person in a good government job was so deeply interested in Tamil.

I attended to my work in the college conscientiously. Those who took over as Principals after Gopála Ráo were also very kind to me. Mr.Bilderbeck who was the principal at the time of printing of *Chinthámani*, gave me a lot of encouragement. He arranged to send copies of *Chinthámani* to reputed places of learning like the University of Cambridge, and for the acknowledgment with thanks to be sent to me.

A Mid Summer Night's Dream:

When the printing of *Puranánooru* was in progress, our college principal was G.H Stone. During his time the college used to be busy with different kind of activities. On one occasion, he arranged for the students to stage a Tamil version of Shakespeare's play, 'A Mid Summer Night's Dream'. The play was translated into Tamil by a college teacher by name Náráyanasámi Iyer. At his request, I reviewed the entire script, suggested some corrections and also added here and there a few songs composed by me. The

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play was a great success. When I was reviewing the translation, a thought occurred to me that I could translate into Tamil and publish the Tamil versions of Shakespeare's plays with help from persons knowledgeable in English. Likewise I too nursed a desire that I could publish Kálidásá's plays into Tamil in a mixture of prose and poetry. When I was studying in Thiruvávaduthurai I had translated a few verses of Sákunthalam into Tamil. However, I thought better of the idea as I was deeply involved in researching, refining and publishing ancient Tamil texts. Many of my colleagues in the college would occasionally urge me to write new prose works. They said these texts can be prescribed as a part of the curriculum and that I could also derive some financial benefits. Under financial pressure, I would sometimes be tempted to follow up on their suggestions. But, with my unifocal involvement in researching ancient Tamil texts, I overcame all such petty attractions.

Assistance to Káveri Áchi:

During that period Sri.Meenákshisundaram Pillai's wife Káveri Âchi was living in Máyuram. There was no one to take care of her or support her. She would often write to me, seeking financial help. I would also try to help her from time to time. While I was deeply engrossed in the publication of ancient Tamil texts, the letters from Káveri Âchi kept me recall gratefully memories of Pillaivál.

Publication of Thiruppugazh:

The then District Munsiff of Thiruthuraippoondi was one Vadakkuppattu Tha.Subramania Pillai. He was a great devotee of Lord Murugá. The *Thiruppugazh* songs composed by Arunagirináthar used to be sung those days on different occasions. A few persons had in their possession palmleaf manuscripts of *Thiruppugazh*. As one with devout

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involvement in Arunagirináthar's work, Subramania Pillai was keenly interested in collecting *Thiruppugazh* songs and publishing them in the form of a book. He started searching for and gathering Thiruppugazh songs from the places where he worked as also from the neighbouring areas. He collated the collected palmleaf manuscripts. He took down the songs from different singers. I handed over to him a few manuscripts I managed to get. I was drawn to him all the more on observing the intensity of his interest in the *Thiruppugazh* project. He would often write to me . When the publication work of Thiruppugazh started, he would send proofs to me for review. When the printing of *Puranánooru* was in progress, the parallel godly work of *Thiruppugazh* brought me Lord Murugá's benediction and also a certain emotional strength.

Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer's Passing:

The year 1893 brought three very sad events. On the sixteenth day of '*Thai*' month in '*Nandaná*' Year (27.1.1893), Mahá Vaidyanátha Iyer left his mortal coil leaving behind his glorious footprints in the field of music. On hearing the news, the grief which overwhelmed my father, Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam Head and myself knew no bounds. 'Where are we again going to hear such great music?' was the constant refrain in everyone's conversation. It is indeed rare to find another person to equal him in Shiva Bakthi, love of language, probity and musical virtuosity.

I Lose My Father:

Both my parents fell seriously ill during September of that year. Their condition became critical. It appeared as if my mother will predecease my father but fate willed otherwise. On the 7th of October, doctor paid his usual visit and examined them both. He told me: "Your father's condition

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is grave. You better move him downstairs." We did so accordingly. Even at that point his memory was sharp. He was chanting the '*Dhyána Sloká*' of '*Panchákshara Manthrá*' and also *Sri. Meenákshi Sundareswarar Dhyána Sloká*'. I was sitting by his side. When he was about to lose his consciousness, he asked me to come close to him and told me in a faint voice, "Remain a stauch devotee of Lord Shivá all your life." That was the last occasion I heard Appá's voice. I never forgot his last benign counsel. I have been following it to the best of my ability. I do not deserve to join the true and ardent devotees of Lord Shivá. Father had been a very staunch devotee of Shivá. Constant worship of Shivá was the very core of his life. The devotion of Shivá is the treasure I inherited from him. And it became an integral part of my being. But, where am I! And where was my Appá!'

He left us. Ammá was lying unconscious and was not aware of Appá's last moments. When the sad news of Appá's demise fell on her ears, she sprang to consciousness. She sat up and started wailing in uncontrollable grief. I experienced unfathomable grief. I cried. I wailed. My friends consoled me; wrote letters of condolence. Many shared their grief in the form of elegies.

I was lost in thoughts of Appá's qualities of head and heart and composed a few verses. His intense devotion of Shivá and his Shiva poojás first came to my mind. Then I remembered his musical accomplishments. I kept thinking of his profound concern in my advancement, and how he had moved from place to place and set up residence with a view to facilitating my study of Tamil. These grateful thoughts found expression in verses. Here is a sample:

Meiyára neeranindhu vizhimanimá ligaipoondu
Kaiyára malaraendhik kasindhurugith thinandhoerum

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Maiyárum manimidatru mádhevai aruchchikkum
Aiyáven naiyáven naiyáveng gagandranaiyae!"

(Where have you gone,
My father dear?
Where indeed have you disappeared?
Smeared with holy ash,
Adorned by Rudhrákshá beads,
Daily you adored
The Lord with azure throat
With melting heart and devotion profound!
And offering prayers.)

"Patralengae senthamizhaip patrikkat raerpalarpál
Thutra lengae Meenatchi Sundaranal láriyanpál
Katralengae katruk kavalaiyoree yannilaiyae
Nitralengae inruvarai neeyarulsei yávidinae!"

(But for your sustained
Love and support,
Where is the question of
My learning great Tamil
With scholars myriad
And under the great savant
Meenákshisundaram
And pursue it to this day?)

Atthá ninadhupiri vallar kadalazhutthi
Pitthákki yennaip peridhum varutthurumál
Etthánan chenrái idhuvoe nin thannaliyae
Satthána inbamuru sangeetha ságaramae!

(O Loving Appá,
The ocean of Music nectarine!
Where at all have you gone?
Is this your grace,
Dumping me in an ocean

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Of maddening unrelenting grief
Of scalding separation?)

Anbodu Sivapoosai yátru midatthodunee
Inbodu pádi irukkumida mundhamiyaen
Thunbodum pádivártthai sollumidan thánumandhoe
Enbodu mulluruga ennai varutthurumál."

(The place where you sat
Performing Shiva pujā
Singing in melody soulful,
The place which banished
All my troubles, dilemmas
The very place

Plunges me into loneliness
Melting my bones and my heart.)

I dutifully performed all the prescribed funeral rites. I had to shoulder the burden of family responsibilities, something I had not known till then. The grief over my father's passing and the new responsibilities, had some negative impact on my Tamil research and study.

Aranganátha Mudaliár's Demise:

Many friends condoled with me over my father's passing. One of them was Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár. Barely two months later I had to mourn the death of that benefactor too. He passed away on 10.12.1893. The news sent shock waves among Tamils. Tamil scholars were plunged in grief. He had headed many institutions and rendered yeoman service. Many noble endeavours flourished under his patronage. All the persons associated with these causes were shocked and left helpless. It was rare those days to find persons with fine proficiency in English and erudition in Tamil. T.T.Kanagasundaram Pillai mentioned in a letter to me ex-

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pressing a sense of loss at Mudaliár's passing: "Now we are left with no one among the English-educated who could also be an expert in Tamil."

I had received from Aranganátha Mudaliár various kinds of assistance. Wealth alone cannot help one achieve excellence. Association with the right kind of persons can yield great benefits. This can facilitate significant achievements which access to money by itself cannot accomplish. My friendship with Aranganátha Mudaliár lent me this strength. I won the esteem of many persons due to my friendship with him. I had derived a lot of benefits from dignitaries I had got to know through him.

When Aranganátha Mudaliár died, I was somehow not in a position to write an elegy. I kept silent, thinking 'Oh! Is he around to listen to and savour what I write?' Some friends pressed me to write some verses, and so I wrote. Here are a few of them:

"*Ponnaip peralám pugazhperalám poovalayam*
Thannaip peralán thagamuayanrál yávaiyumae
Pinnaip peralám pirazhá manavalisaer
Unnaip perumárum undo uraiyáyae!"

(*Joy we can get*
Fame we can gain
And the whole world too.
Putting in effort supreme
Any and everything we can win.
But, alas!
Can we at all get
One of your kind
Of mind strong, unbending?
Pray tell me!)

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Paniyár silasor pagarndhe yulangkuzhaipoi
Kaniyár inimai kalandhae suvaigal pala
Naniyár thamizhin nayantheriya vallárthám
Iniyá runaippoe liniyár iniyárae."

(*With words but a few*
You would move many hearts.
You scanned the realm of
Tamil glorious

With its manifold beauties
Its exquisite savours
Its enthralling finesse.
When comes another!)

Tharanga vaelai yanaiya dháya sabaiyi daippu kund hunin
Ruranga landha vángi laeya rorumozhip prasangaman
Garanganádha vallal poela varava varvi yandhutham
Siranga randhu lakku máruseppa vallar yávarae.

(*An assembly of*
Scholars debating like a rough ocean,
Enter you...
A lecture follows
Weighty and incisive
In the ruler's language.
Logic invincible rules.
Listeners spellbound.
The likes of patron Aranganáthan,
Can we ever see again?)

My mental strength suffered under the weight of grief over the passing of my father and Aranganátha Mudaliár and due to my worries about the new family responsibilities. It also took a toll on my health. I fell ill with bilious fever; it lasted a few weeks. With proper treatment I managed to pull through the ordeal.

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119. PURANÁNOORU PUBLISHED

The printing of *Puranánooru* began during September 1894. This was the first of the Eight Sangam Anthologies I had published. Therefore, I wrote the history of the eight Anthologies in my Introduction to this volume. I also explained in some detail the two categories of Akam and Puram.

Introduction:

I collated and codified different kinds of information embedded in Puranánooru and wrote it down in the Agaval verse of my own. I briefly mentioned the relevant matters concerning the commentary, and also wrote as follows to highlight the condition of the palmleaf manuscripts I had collected so that the efforts involved were brought home to the readers:

"The bare text without commentary posed many problems and challenges: there was excess and shortage of letters and words; distorted and vitiated in various ways; the *Thinai* (Situation) and *Thurai* (Theme) aspects not mentioned at the foot of some poems; in some poems the name of the author and the protagonist damaged beyond recognition; some poems finding a place in two different locations with two different numbers; two poems properly belonging to two different places located in the same place bearing the same number. Sometimes a whole poem was missing, or the initial part or the final part or the middle part; in some

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poems there were more lines than considered prosodically appropriate, some lines possibly drawn from another poem; and one and the same line appearing within the same poem pointing to redundancy; mix-up of words frustrating attempts at discerning the meaning. The manuscripts were riddled with such problems, making the reading and comprehension a daunting task. While so, a patient study of the quotations from this text in full or in part found interspersed in the commentaries on other texts by old commentators, was found to be of value. This process helped in identifying the errors and refining the text; finding the true meaning through this route; to fill up the missing parts in some poems; and in removing the distortions and discrepancies in a few poems and reshaping them properly."

I realized that the information contained in Puranánooru could assist in constructing the history of Tamil Nádu, and that they would be a valuable aid in different kinds of research; so, I started delving into and researching these aspects. I had in my possession unpublished texts of the Eight Anthologies and also several other ancient texts. As I was involved in publishing these ancient works one by one, I was not in a position to devote any time to research other fields. I thought that if I managed to bring to life the basic texts, researchers could analyze them and publish historical findings and other pointers. I mentioned this in my Introduction: "By carefully researching this book, scholars dedicating their lives to the study of the ancient history of Tamil Nádu and disseminating that knowledge, would find useful information in their pursuit".

Highlighting the Contents:

I thought that classifying and highlighting the contents of the book could aid such researchers. With this idea in

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mind, I prepared an alphabetical index of countries, parts of countries, towns, mountains and rivers. I also prepared outline histories of the poets and the protagonists, duly underlining the discrepancies found in the data. I also provided an index of items and events, an annotated glossary of themes, notes on themes, a glossary of rare words and grammatical notes. In the final portion of the book, I appended the notes provided by V.Venkaiáh and V.Kanagasabai Pillai.

When I looked at the final version of the book I was filled with amazement – have I indeed accomplished all this? I was full of gratitude for the grace of god. Many friends wrote congratulatory letters to me admiring the get-up and the contents of the book. I had a residual grief that Salem Rámasámi Mudaliár and Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár were not around to see and savour the book in its final form.

Persuasion by Friends:

The publication of the book won me many new friends. There was friendly persuasion from many quarters regarding the future publication of several ancient texts. Thi.Tha. Kanagasundaram Pillai wrote to me that I should take up the publication of Manimekalai and *Udhayanan Kadhai*. Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár urged me to publish Pathitru-*ppatthu* and *Akanānooru*, promising necessary financial assistance.

I had also been concurrently researching on these works and a few other ancient works. If the work on one text left me with fatigue, I took to researching another text. If I felt tired preparing notes on one text, I would rejoice savouring another work. Consequently many ancient works continued within the ambit of my research.

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New House:

On completing the work related to Puranánooru, I thought a more spacious house would be very beneficial to continue my future research work. My father had tried to buy a new house of our own. It could not materialize during his lifetime due to financial constraints. Because of the pressing need for more space, I decided that I should not delay the matter further. My own savings were supplemented with a loan and I bought a house for Rs.3000 in Saháji Náicker Street. One Sáminátha Iyer was the owner of the house. When I bought the house from him I quipped, "It hardly matters whether the house is with you or with me. After all we bear the same name."

There were three bays on the ground floor of that house and some accommodation upstairs. It was a very convenient dwelling for our family. It was on the banks of the Cauvery river and stood just opposite to the college. I could leave the house on hearing the first bell from the college and still reach there in time. I moved into the house on an auspicious day and continued with my Tamil research.

Pánditthurai Thevar:

Pálavanattham zamindár Pánditthurai Thevar was one of those who wrote to me on receipt of Puranánooru. He had stated in his letter, "I appreciate your sustained efforts in printing and publishing rare and valuable books. I am ever eager to provide you assistance within my means. I am awaiting advice from you regarding the appropriate time for this assistance - Pándhitthurai , 14.11.1894." A few weeks later he came to Thiruvidaimarudhur to pay respects to the Head of Thiruvávaduthurai Mutt. The Ádheenam Head Ambalavána Desikar informed me of the visit and requested me to join. Accordingly I went there, met Pánditthurai

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Thevar and had discussions with him. After complimenting me on the Puranánooru publication, he asked me which work I was going to publish next.

"There are many ancient texts. I was planning to publish *Manimekalai*. But, some of the matters in the work are still not very clear to me. There is an anthology called Puratthirattu. It contains many verses which are not presently in vogue. While researching on Puranánooru, I wanted to gain a clear understanding of the grammatical norms governing Puram themes. As I was seeking light on the themes of that book, *Purapporull Vennpá Málai* was found to be very useful. I analyzed it thoroughly. I also happened to possess an old commentary on that work. The basic text alone had earlier been published by Saravana Perumál Iyer. I am now thinking of publishing that work with the commentary."

As soon as Pánditthurai Thevar returned to Rámanáthapuram, he sent me a letter in verse, dated 17.12.1894 enclosing a demand draft for 500 rupees.

1. "*Thingal puraiyum thiruvadhanach chelviyoru*
   Panginamar pemmán padhamalarae – thunga
2. *Mudikkaniyáth thángi mudhuparavaivaelip*
   Padikkaniyá yendrum palanool - vadikkum
3. *Ulatthárk korunidhiyá yongupugazh maeya*
   Valatthá luyarkudandhai mannith - thulakkariya
4. *Neminá thanmarugi naeyamanaiyá loduvázh*
   Sáminá thaiya thagunannba – mámugavai
5. *Manniyappan ditthuraipal vandhananchei din-*
   drezhudhum Nanniruba meedhám… …

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6. *Kámári thandhavilang kádhalanae ráitthamizhin*
   Mámári peidhulagai vázhvippoi…..

7. *Payansiriya dhaenum panaiyalavák kollvar*
   Nayanrerivo renravunnmai nádi – muyandridupo

8. *Dhainnooru roopá vanuppinanah dhetrarulvái*
   Meinooruree yozhugum vitthagá - mainnoori

9. *Âamálai yirchuvaiyundákkum purapporullvenn*
   pámálai yachchir padhivuseyyum - mámuyarchi

10. *Oorrikandu mutra luruvippá nongugaván*
    Árukanda senni yarull.

(O Sáminátha Aiyá, worthy friend!
Who devoutly carries on his head
The feet of Lord Shivá
Whose one half is Devi Umá
With a glowing moon-like countenance;

Who is publishing great texts ancient
The jewels of the ocean-girded world
Who lives in Kudanthai land
Fertile and famed
And treasure to those who love it;
Recipient of the grace of
The consort Thirumagal of Lord Vishnu
And also of Saraswathi His daughter

O Friend!
Respected epistle this is from
Pánditthurai of Mukavai;
Pouring are you torrents of Tamil
To the world's benefit
Much like the charming Muruga
The gift of Shivá;
The wise accept even tiny gift
As munificence mighty,

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Bearing this adage in mind
I have sent rupees five hundred
Be gracious to accept it.

O scholar eminent gleaming with holy ash!
May the Lord bearing Ganges in his head
Shower grace on you
To rid all hurdles from
Your valued effort
To publish Purapporull Venpámálai
Sweet and enchanting.

I wrote to Pánditthurai Thevar expressing my gratitude for his handsome help and also informed Ambalavána Desikar. He immediately gave me 300 rupees. These two gifts helped me discharge the loan I had raised for the purchase of the house.

Purapporull Vennpá Málai:

The letter from Pándithurai Thevar provided me the incentive to commence the publication work related to Purapporull Vennpá Málai. I took up that work as the next candidate for publication.

Purapporull Vennpá Málai is a grammar work consisting of the rules governing the major division of Puram, and provides Vennpá stánzás as illustrations of these rules. It is also known simply as Vennpá Málai. Aiyanáridhanár of the Chera clan was its author. I had a commentary on the work, but I did not then know who was its author. Later, based on a note found in an old manuscript in Madurai Tamil Sangam, Rámanáthapuram Mahávidwán Sri. Rá. Rághavaiyengár discovered that the author of that commentary was Mákaral Chámundi Devanáyakar.

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Ilampooranam:

I have a few copies of palmleaf manuscripts of Purapporull Vennpá Málai. I kept on searching for more. Thi. Tha.Kanagasundaram Pillai handed over an old palmleaf manuscript to me and said, "I am not able to figure out what this manuscript is about. I found a stray presence of Vennpá stánzás dealing with Puram. You may like to have a look at it." I found that the leaves were not arranged in a proper order and were generally disorganized. With great difficulty I had the leaves properly arranged and had a copy made of it. Then, on reading it, I found it to be a commentary of *Tholkáppiyam Poruladikáram*. The portion containing commentary on Pura Thinai had cited many stánzás from Porupporull Vennpá Málai as examples. The commentary appeared, in parts, to be different from that already available in print. I thought that it was possibly some other old commentary, but could not figure out who the author was. I read it once more.

I began to study carefully all the texts dealing with Puram, as also the related grammatical explanations. I found the commentators dealing with Evening as a theme. There was a note in this portion that Uraiyásiriyar had offered a particular explanation. Linking that note with the Tholkáppiyam commentary I had with me, I could make out that the commentator was Ilampooranár. I was overjoyed at this accidental discovery. This was an unexpected gain from my research on Purapporull. I studied that commentary again carefully, analyzed the illustrations quoted there, and was able to identify their source.

I assembled and put in place all the materials required for publishing Purapporull Venpá Málai, went to Madras and arranged for printing.

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120. RESEARCH IN MANIMEKALAI

The Head of the Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam, Ambalavána Desikar, was well-versed in Tamil. He also loved Sanskrit and was well-trained in music. He took special lessons in Sanskrit with Vidwán Muthu Shástri of Kallidaikkurichi. People lauded him on par with Karna and Bhoja as a great patron and benefactor.

Thiruvávaduthurai Library:

He wanted to establish a good library at the Mutt. The Mutt already had a library. His desire was to expand it, by adding printed books in Tamil, Sanskrit and English covering various fields. He constructed a large building to house this library. It is now known as Saraswathi Mahál.

Desikar sent me to Madrás with a few Mutt officials to buy the necessary books.

He entrusted me with another responsibility. Rámanáthapuram Rájá Bháskara Sethupathi had planned, on a few occasions, to visit Thiruvávaduthurai, but somehow it never came off. The people of the Mutt had a desire to get him to the Mutt at least once. When my visit to Madrás was planned to buy books, Sethupathi was in Madrás. "You should meet him there and somehow persuade him to pay us a visit. This is your responsibility, " Desikar told me.

The first thing I did on reaching Madrás was to meet Raja Bháskara Sethupathi. As a genuine lover of Tamil, he was speaking to me very genially. When I told him about

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the purpose of my visit, he graciously agreed to visit Thiruvávaduthurai. I immediately relayed the message to Ambalavána Desikar through a letter. Books worth five thousand rupees were purchased for the Mutt library. We bought books in different languages. Vai.Mu.Sadagopa Rámánujácháriár was with me and offered advice in the matter of purchase of books. I sent all the books by a goods train to Thiruvávaduthurai.

Visiting Mani Iyer:

It was at that time that Mani Iyer was appointed as a judge of the High Court. Whenever I visited Madras earlier, I used to see him and get encouraged in my work. This time I went to him to offer my felicitations. As soon as he saw me he said, "Puranánooru has come out well. What are you presently working on?" He had already received a copy of Puranánooru and also sent me the money.

I told him: "I was very happy to hear the good news of your appointment as a judge. It is indeed the good fortune of the people. I hesitate to move with you with the same kind of freedom I had before."

"Why say such things? Have I suddenly sprouted a pair of horns? You may come here as always, talk, eat and tell me openly if there is anything I could do for you." It was clear from the tone of his words that his intrinsic benevolence would never ever change.

I took leave of him, saw a few other friends and returned to Thiruvávaduthurai. Bháskara Sethupathi had stated that he would visit Thiruvávaduthurai on January 31, 1895. It coincided with Gurupoojá, a major festival in Thiruvávaduthurai. I decided to get the new library opened before his visit, and found January 30 as an auspicious date.

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Ambalavána Desikar sought my opinion on naming the library.

I suggested the name '*Vidhyá Nidhi*'. Vidhyá Nidhi was opened on January 30. Many important dignitaries and scholars from places like Kumbakonam and Máyuram attended the formal inauguration.

Bháskara Sethupathi visited the Mutt the next day. The reception he received was effusive. A large thatched shed had been set up bearing the name '*Bháskara Vilásam*'. Though a thatched shed, it had been decorated like a huge mansion. I enjoyed the opportunity of being with Sethupathi and Ádheenam Head and discussing matters with them. After the brief visit, Sethupathi left.

Research in Manimekalai Begins:

The printing and publication of Purapporull Vennpá Málai was completed. I did not encounter any major problem in this project. But the research on Manimekalai posed many problems to me. Firstly I could not figure out the religion to which the text belonged. It was Maloor Rangácháriár, a teacher in Kumbakonam College, who informed me that it is a Buddhist text.* The details in this context may be found in the essay entitled '*Manimekalai and Three Jewels*' appearing in my '*Ninaivu Manjari*' (Memoirs).

Till then I was unsure about the nature of the text; but now, a different kind of fear seized me. 'As I had studied in a Saivaite Mutt, I had the opportunity to study major Saivite texts. With the help of visiting Vaishnava scholars I could also learn about Vaishnavism. When I was involved in the publication of Chinthámani, I was struggling without adequate knowledge of Jainism. Fortunately I could land some Jain friends. I could learn many matters about that religion. Now I have taken up a Buddhist text. I know next to noth-

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ing about Buddhism.

I had Jain friends to know about Jainism. Buddhism is practically extinct in India. Where can I go in search of Buddhists? How am I going to learn about Buddhist religion and tradition?' My mind was in a whirl.

At that point, Rangáchárıár came to my rescue. "Don't worry. There are hundreds of books in English dealing with Buddhism. Europeans have researched and produced those books. I have myself read quite a few of them. I would manage to read other books too and tell you whatever could be useful to you."

I clung to him firmly as a major refuge in my research into Manimekalai.

Research on Buddhism:

From then on I plunged into a study and research of Buddhism. I began searching for matters related to Buddhism appearing in Tamil texts and collated them. In Neelakesi's commentary, the portions condemning Buddhism contained useful information on the life-history of Lord Buddha and the religious tenets of Buddhism. In the commentary on the grammar text *Veerachozhiam* composed by a Tamil scholar by name Buddha Mitrar, many verses about Lord Buddha appeared as examples. I copied them down and started studying them. In Gnánaprakásar commentary on *Sivagnána Siddhiár Parapakkam*, there is a portion condemning Buddhism; it contained references to many Buddhist doctrines. I carefully noted them down. Apart from this, I could not access any work on Buddhism either in Tamil or in Sanskrit. Rangáchárıár told me that most of the texts on Buddhism are available only in Páli language. Rangáchárıár read out to me the books written by Monier Williams, Max Mueller, Oldenberg, Rhys Davis

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and others. I procured a few more books and handed them over to him. The more I heard about the history of Lord Buddha, the more I got immersed in the nobility of His personality.

I kept studying the *Manimekalai* text. Many matters which had confounded me earlier gradually became somewhat clear. It contained tenets of Buddhism in simple and lucid language. I rejoiced reading them. On listening to those portions, Rangácháriár used to get overjoyed. "Ah! How beautiful! How apt and lucid is the Tamil rendering!" He would never tire of admiring this. He would request me to read over and over again the portions lauding Lord Buddha's qualities, and be lost in joy. "I have read a lot in English. But I have never come across passages of such exquisite beauty." He was all enthusiasm.

Beautiful Passages:

Manimekalai expounds the Four Noble Truths: The Truth of Suffering, The Origin of Suffering, Relief from Suffering, and The Path leading to the Annulment of Suffering. Here is a passage which briefly highlights these truths:

Pirandho ruruvadhu perugiya thunbam;
Piravá ruruvadhu perumpae rinbam;
Patrin varuvadhu munnadhu; pinna
Dhatrae ruruva dhariga."

(*Know ye all!*
Multiple misery trails birth,
Freedom from birth grants bliss,
Attachment the root of suffering,
Detachment the fount of joy.)

The portions praising Lord Buddha are many. The lines hailing Lord Buddha, the Preserver of Dharma rooted

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in compassion, enthralled and profoundly moved me.

The author of *Manimekalai* is lost in devotion to Lord Buddha and praises him with evocative expressions: 'Lived not for himself but for others'; 'Heroic Conqueror of Cupid'; 'Vanquisher of Vile Enemy'; 'Nobility at the Service of Others'; 'Sought not Paradise for Himself'.

On appropriate occasions I used to recite verses I had come across in other Tamil texts. There is a lament of those who were near Lord Buddha when he entered Pari Nirváná, the 'Ultimate Salvation'. This had been quoted in the commentary on *Veerasozhiyam*.

Marularuttha perumbodhi mádhavaraik kandilamál
Ensei gaemyám
Arulirundha thirumozhiyá laravazhakkang kettilamál
Ensei gaemyám
Porulariyu marundhavatthup puravalarik kandilamál
Ensei gaemyám.

(Darkness he felled with Enlightenment
The great Saint
O we can't see him again,
What ever shall we do?
Dharma He expounded

With words benign suffused with compassion
O we can't hear them again,
What ever shall we do?

Penance led him to the Truth Supreme
O we can't see again that Benefactor,
What ever shall we do?)

When I was reading this poem, I could barely read on; I was emotionally overwhelmed and my voice faltered. Rangácháriár dissolved himself in the profound sorrow ani-

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mating the poem.

So continued my *Manimekalai* research, emotionally submerged in Lord Buddha's life history, and rejoicing the knowledge of Buddhist principles.

Sumangalar's Help:

The epic talks of Manimekalai's visit to Lanka. The names of a few places in Lanka find a place in the work. I wrote to Po.Kumárasámi Mudaliár of Colombo requesting him to ascertain and advise me the details about these places, and also seeking his help in advising me of the persons who can help me understand matters related to Buddhism. Mudaliár informed me that there was a Buddhist savant by name Sumangalar working as the Principal of Vidyodaya College. He sought the help of that scholar and relayed his advice on Buddhist texts and the principles enshrined in them. It was through that I learned that the term 'Samanoli' in the verse

'*Ilanká theevatthu Samanoli ennum Silambu*'

(*The hillock known as Samanoli on the Lanka Island*)

'Samantham' or the rock popularly known as 'Adam's Peak'. I also learnt that it contained the footprints of Lord Buddha.

Enthralling Passages:

While I enjoyed reading Manimekalai in the company of Rághavácháriár, I also got deeply involved in studying it again and again by myself. In particular, I frequently ruminated about the passage which negates the human body.

Vinaiyin vandhadhu vinaikkuvilai váyadhu
Punaivana neengir pulálpurath thiduvadhu

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Mooppuvili vudaiyadhu theeppini yirukkai
Patrin patridan kutrak kollgalam
Putradan kávir setrarach chaekkai
Avalak kavalai kaiyá razhungal
Thavalá vullan thanpá ludaiyadhu
Makkal yákkai

(*The Human Body -*
The result of Karmá
The cause of Karmá,
Victim of age and death,
The abode of severe
Diseases and disorders,
The receptacle of
Attachments and evil deeds,
Seething serpent hiding
In an anthill,
A helpless mind brimming with
Worries and anguish no end.)

The following lines singing the glory of Annadánam, the 'gift of food' moved me profoundly:

"*Mandini gyálatthu vázhvork kellám*
Undi koduthor uyirkoduth thorae
(*You give food to those*
Peopling the earth,
You give the very gift of life.)

Áputthiran pillories paradise because it is a place shorn of *Dharmá* and *Dháná*, compassionate giving and true generosity:

Aramsei mákkal purangáth thombunar
Natravan cheidhoer patrara muyalvor

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Yávaru milláth thevarnan náttuk
Kiraiva nágiya voruperu vaendhae."

(*O Lord Eminent of*
The great world of Devás!
(A perfect world) where
None does dharmá,
None protects or helps,
None does good penance,
None tries to sever attachments.)

I found the depth of meaning of these words addressed to Indira overwhelming.

Rangácháriár remained in Kumbakonam for a period of one and a half years. I used to meet him every day and note down details about Buddhist principles he shared with me. Then he was transferred to Madras. When he was leaving for Madras he told me, "Make sure you publish this book as soon as possible. It would be a priceless treasure."

"I know you are transferring to Madras. But, mark my words. Your link with Manimekalai is not going to snap. I would continue to meet you there and keep bothering you." I told him half in jest.

"In that case, I would indeed be very lucky, "He expressed his happiness. Manimekalai's rich content and exquisite passages had been firmly lodged in his heart.

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121. MANIMEKALAI IN PRESS

Rev.G.U.Pope was one of my Western friends. He had lived in Tamil Nadu for many years. He has written a small grammar book in Tamil for children. It became popular in Tamil Nadu as *Pope Iyer Ilakkanam*. He has translated and published in English *Thiruvásakam* and *Náladiyár*. He was working as Professor of Tamil in Oxford University.

Once when I was talking to Poondi Aranganátha Mudaliár, G.U.Pope's name figured in our conversation. Mudaliár said: "His translation of Náladiyár is very good. With considerable effort he has collected a lot of information and included them in his book. He has also made laudatory reference to your edition of Seevaga Chinthámani." He also handed over to me his copy of the book.

Friendship with Dr. Pope:

After Puranánooru was published, I sent him a copy. Aranganátha Mudaliár had then passed away. For a few months I did not receive any response from Pope. I was left wondering if the book had at all reached him. Then I received a letter from him in May. It was written in English.

Indian Institute
Oxford
26-4-1895.

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...I should have written to you earlier about your Puranánánooru. I have in my possession your excellent edition of *Seevaga Chinthámani*. I have frequently been using it. I have also referred to it in Page 41 of the Introduction to my Náladiyár publication. Have you published any other books? I propose to write a Paper to Royal Asiatic Society on your publications. Would it be possible for you to make your *Puranánooru* edition simpler and more interesting? Though I fancy that I know Tamil, I am not able to understand many parts. So, the commentary should be couched in more lucid and reader-friendly style. Show mercy to non-scholars like me.

Chinthámani is found to be easier. For the sake of our dear and honoured Tamil, we need a well-researched critical edition of *Tholkáppiyam*.... Cutting off the legends which abound, we should produce an authentic history of the three Tamil Sangams.... At least, please advise me how to study Puranánooru and benefit from it...."

On reading this first letter from him, I could recognize his love and passion for Tamil. As one who was keenly interested in publishing Tamil classics in authentic and attractive manner , I found his concern and words eminently appropriate.

Later, I sent him a copy of Purapporull Vennpá Málai. As soon as he received it, he wrote the following letter.

Balliol College
Oxford
21-10-1895.

"..... I thank you for sending me *Purapporull Vennpá Málai*. There is a copy of this work in our Tamil library.

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I am striving to complete reading it. I do draw up many a plan. But, you are young; I am an old man!

'Oru pozhudhu vázhva dhariyár karudhuba
-Kodiyu malla pala.'

(*Those who know not*
If they would even survive the day
Weave a web of a million thoughts)

I have been very ill for some time; still I hope to accomplish something more. Your edition is accurate and complete. All the ancient Tamil works should be made accessible to the new Tamils. Keep doing the needful..."

In this letter he had written the Thirukkural quotation in Tamil itself. His writing pointed to his tremulous hand and his words appeared to indicate his poor health. I could well imagine his frame of mind when he wrote the poignant Thirukkural words, 'Those who know not if they would even survive the day'. The Kural verse he had quoted, highlighted his apprehension that while he was striving to accomplish many things, his life could well be cut short. I prayed for his long life.

Fortunately, his health improved. Though subject to the frailty of advanced years, his passion for Tamil must have infused a new strength in him. He wrote to me again in the beginning of 1896.

Balliol College
Oxford
3-1-1896

"...I have put off writing to you for long. Please pardon me.

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I have been reading with pleasure your excellent editions of Puranánooru and Purapporull Vennpá Málai. They complement each other beautifully.

I am presently writing an essay on Pári, his daughters, Kapilar, Kopperum Cholan, Pisirándayár and Pothiyár. I am looking for more traditional stories about them. Poems 115 to 10 are truly captivating...

I had instructed the Oxford people to send you a copy of Náladiyár. Have you received it?

My warm New Year greetings:

I received the copy of Náladiyár sent by him. On reading his letter, I could feel his interest and involvement in a deep study of Tamil works. I was taken in by his principle that one should learn anything with clarity and communicate it to others with lucidity.

I used to compare the love of Tamil of Jubilee Vinson of Paris with that of Pope of Oxford. Each was special in its own way. Both of them manifested perseverance and loving involvement in the work they had undertaken. I felt sad that such qualities are substantially absent amongst our countrymen and that they waste away their lives in sloth and indolence. Reverend Pope wrote many letters to me. He selected many rare poems from Puranánooru and Purapporull Vennpá Málai and published their English translations. At the beginning of each year, he used to send me with his compliments these English translations.

My involvement in Tamil research got reinforced with my friendship with such genuine and hardworking scholars. I continued my research in Manimekalai.

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Letters from Sundaram Pillai:

In the beginning of 1896 Prof.P.Sundaram Pillai of Thiruvananthapuram informed me that they were looking for a Tamil teacher in the college. He further informed me that if I took up the assignment I would get an initial monthly salary of fifty-five rupees and that it would be increased gradually. I was not inclined to accept the offer. Subsequently they appointed someone who knew English.

Some parts of *Manonmaneeyam* play composed by Sundaram Pillai had been prescribed as a part of the college textbooks. While taking that lesson, I used to commend portions deserving of praise; and also point to the students what I considered to be mistakes. On learning about this through some persons, Sundaram Pillai requested me to inform him of those mistakes. He readily agreed with the corrections suggested by me and thanked me. Thereafter he often wrote to me friendly letters.

Kádhai and Páttu:

I was taking necessary steps to reach Manimekalai to the press for early printing. The copy I had obtained from Midhilaippatti was of great use. In the other copies each canto was named as *Kádhai*. They were referred to as *Páttu* in the *Midhilaippatti* copy. In the Preface, Padhikam was named as *Kádhai Podhi Páttu* (The canto summarizing the story); next, as 'Chapter announcing the Festival' – '*Vizhá Varaindha Páttu*'. Likewise, the titles of the other portions were also named differently. Form these titles I could gather that one meaning of the term Kádhai was Páttu. There were also other indications to sustain this conclusion.

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The Bare Text of Manimekalai:

The bare text of Manimekalai had been published in print by Thirumayilai Vidwán Shanmugam Pillai in 1891. He had reproduced the wording in the palmleaf manuscripts without a proper evaluation of their meaning. It was difficult to access the meaning of the verses merely on the basis of that copy. Thi.Tha.Kanagasundaram Pillai had already written to me when that copy was published: "They showed me three formes of *Manimekalai*. They were worse than what I had seen before. The printing merely followed the palmleaves. One could even say that the palmleaf versions were better. What is stated in the palmleaves as 'Chokkalingam', some may read as 'Kalingam', by merely reading the printed text without reference to palmleaves, others might read it as Chokkalingam, which is contextually appropriate. After they had printed this word as *Chera Kalingam*, those who had no access to the palmleaves would be obliged to read it only as 'Chera Kalingam' if the expression 'Etti Kumaran Irundhon thannai' is written as 'Ettirumán irundhon' and '*Árari Andhanar*' is printed as '*Átri Andhanar*', you can imagine the ensuing confusion in the reader." (Letter dated 29.3. 1891). When I looked at the printed version of the book, I realized that there is more scope for research and analysis.

Notes:

As seven years had elapsed since that version was published, I thought that it would not be wrong to publish another version of *Manimekalai* on the basis of my subsequent research and with many supportive notes. Many friends told me to write detailed commentary on the entire Manimekalai and then publish it. Rev.Pope had already stressed that

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Tamil classics should be published in a lucid and readable manner; this was also an additional incentive for me. Without attempting verbatim meanings I had written down copious and detailed notes, and was at the end of my labour. The chapter entitled '*Samaya Kanakkar Thanthiram Ketta Kádhai*' contained references to the doctrines of religion other than Buddhism. The section entitled '*Thavatthiram Poondu dharmam Ketta Kádhai*' deals with basic Buddhist doctrines and related matters. Writing notes on these two aspects appeared truly daunting. So, I approached Mahá Mahopádhyáya Rangácháriár of Kurichi, an authority on Sanskrit logic and related aspects, and sought his advice.

He clearly explained all the points in the former chapter. But he could not explain the matters contained in the last chapter. He said, "Ancient books dealing with this subject are no longer available. This is a very ancient mode of logic."

I obtained clarification in respect of some Sanskrit usages by approaching Kumbakonam College Sanskrit pundit Perugavázhndhán Mahá Mahopádhyáya Rangácháriár and Thirumalai Eechampádi Sadhávadhánam Srinivásácháriár.

Based on this broad approach, I managed to write reasonably credible notes on most chapters. When it came to the chapter dealing with logic I sought advice from specialists in the field and adopted the readings that appeared most tenable. I also provided footnotes about textual variations I had encountered.

My Joy:

On finalizing all the works related to the publication, I took the final version of Manimekalai to Madrás on 5.6.1896

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and handed it over for printing at Vá.Ná.Jubilee Press.

The printing was started, including my footnotes. When I cleared the first forme, god only knows how elated I was. I had been hassled by doubts whether I could at all get the book published. And when I saw it in the final shape, I was overwhelmed with joy.

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122. A TITLE FOR ME

While Manimekalai was in the press, I thought that it would be a good idea to append a brief history of Manimekalai to the book and did so accordingly. As a knowledge of matters concerning Buddhism was scarce in the country, I explained these aspects here and there in my Notes. While so, I thought that it would be very useful to the readers if I could write a comprehensive note on Buddhist doctrines and include it in the book. When I was discussing various matters concerning Manimekalai with Maloor Rngácháriár, I used to take down notes separately. With the help of my friends proficient in English I had taken down in Tamil, portions from English books dealing with Buddhism.

The Three Jewels:

The Buddhist tradition regards the Buddha, the Buddha Dharmá and the Buddha Sanghá as the Three Jewels of Buddhism. With the help of my Notes, I began writing the history of the Three Jewels. When Rangácháriár was in Kumbakonam, I showed my notes to him from time to time and got them suitably refined. After his transfer to Madras, whenever I went to Madrás I would show the notes I had made in the meanwhile and get his counsel. He used to warmly appreciate the Tamil poems woven into my notes.

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The Arrival of Pándithurai Thevar:

During November 1898 Pálavanattham Po.Pándi Thurai Thevar came on a visit to Kumbakonam to pay his respects to Mouna Swámigal. I accorded him a fitting welcome and arranged for his speech in an assembly of dignitaries. He stayed in Kumbakonam for three days. He came to my house once. On that occasion, I played host to a number of friends and also arranged for a music concert by Vidwán Seenu Iyengár and Thirukkodikkával Krishna Iyer who had accompanied him. Pándithurai Thevar saw all the rare palmleaf manuscripts I had collected; he was visibly amazed. When he learnt that Manimekalai was then in print, he promised to provide financial assistance.

I showed him a copy of Puratthirattu in my possession and informed him that it was an anthology containing many poems drawn from many ancient texts. He told me: "I have been thinking of collecting didactic verses from many texts and publishing an anthology. I would find it useful if I could peruse this anthology once." He took that manuscript from me during his next visit to Kumbakonam on the occasion of Mahámaham.

Rare Honour:

The Mahámaham festival was celebrated in February 1897. Kumbakonam then attracted incredible crowds. Thiruvávaduthurai Ádheenam Head Ambalavána Desikar was staying with his retinue in the Mutt's building in Paettai Street in Kumbakonam. Dignitaries and scholars from many regions had assembled there.

Learned discussions and lectures by scholars in the presence of Ambalavána Desikar was a daily feature there.

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One day was set apart to give special rewards to outstanding scholars. Ambalavána Desikar arranged to place six special seats, and in five out of the six he seated five outstanding Sanskrit scholars. After they took their seats he called me, showed the sixth seat and asked me to take it. I was somewhat startled. 'Where are those great savants who had spent their life-time of intense involvement in scholarly pursuits and had lent lustre to their branches of learning! And where am I!' Seeing me standing perplexed, he said, "What are you thinking about? Do take your seat."

"I am not qualified to appear equal to these great men," I said.

"The whole world knows your erudition. If we searched intently we may find great scholars like them. But it is difficult to find one like you." His affectionate insistence left me with no choice. I sat along with those titans, in all humility. I was honoured with a double shawl and other gifts. I thought that the honour was bestowed on me due to my unrelenting effort in publishing *Manimekalai*, and thanked the Lord for this benediction.

Pannool Thirattu:

Pándithurai Thevar and his friend and Tamil scholar Veera Ve. Chinnaiya Chettiár had come to attend the Mahámaham. I enjoyed the conversations with them. I handed over a copy of *Puratthirattu* to Pándi Thaevar. He collected a large number of didactic verses and published a book named *Pannool Thirattu*. I came to know later that Puratthirattu was of great help in his endeavour.

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My Son's Wedding:

In June 1897, my son Chiranjeevi Kalyánasundaram's wedding took place; the bride was the daughter of Sri. Chakrapáni Iyer of Nágappattinam. Soon after, a ceremony of 'The Bride Entering The House' followed in Kumbakonam. Ambalavána Desikar and others helped me in many ways. My son's wedding date coincided with the diamond jubilee of Queen Victoria; that event was celebrated in a grand manner in many places. In connection with this celebration in Karur, the District Munsiff of Karur Sri. A.Sámbamurthy Shastri requested me to compose a few verses in honour of Queen Victoria. I complied with his wish.

Release of Manimekalai:

The printing of the main text of Manimekalai, along with its gloss, was completed in July 1898. Other items of interest were also included in the book: Preface, the Life of Buddha, Buddha Dharma, Buddha Sanga and a synopsis of the story. When the book was released, I received a large number of laudatory messages. I had included appropriate quotations from 59 Tamil texts and 29 Sanskrit works. Apart from this, I had also incorporated selected extracts from the commentaries of Tamil and Sanskrit works. The information I had collected from those works and their commentators formed part of a separate section entitled 'Items referred to in the Glossary'. I had also included in appropriate places, a few verses from Kundalakesi I had got to know through Puratthirattu. On reading that section some friends told me, "There is a type of dictionary in English called Encyclopaedia. If you could append such a section in respect of every book published by you, these can be

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put together as a valuable book." I always had an instinctive desire that such a comprehensive work of reference should be published in Tamil. The request from my friends gave a sharper edge to that desire.

Manimekalai was my first publication which included my own commentary. Many persons lauded the simple and lucid style of my commentary. Many were appreciative of the detailed explanation of many abstruse matters. Vi. Ko. Suryanarāyana Shástri, a Tamil teacher in Christian College, wrote to me on these lines: "I am not inclined to write something merely flattering this edition of Manimekalai. It is truly outstanding. I am indeed overjoyed at the appropriateness of the commentary and the excellence of presentation which transcends the likes and dislikes of readers. People like me are in a festive mood of joyous celebration and ecstatic dance in praise of benevolent Sámináthan. May our Lord Meenákshisundará of pristine glory, savouring the delight of nectarine Tamil, shower His grace on you for a long life, like the eternal sun, so that you may shed light and meaning on many more Tamil works. May His benediction help you sustain the eminence of Nachinárkkiniyar in our midst."

A Title For Me:

I was flooded with compliments concerning the publication of Manimekalai, both by letters and by word of mouth. In the March 7, 1899 issue of '*Viveka Diwákaran*' journal, an article appeared under a pseudonym 'Ánandan'. On seeing the title, Boutha Samaya Pravarthanāchāriār I thought that it concerned a Buddhist savant and started reading it eagerly. But it turned out to be an article on me!

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"Kumbakonam College Tamil Pundit Utthamadánapuram Sáminátha Iyer has dedicated his life in researching Tamil Sangam classics, and has printed and published very ancient and exalted Buddhist texts, such as Chinthámani, Silappadikáram and Manimekalai and spread them over the Tamil land. Thus the resultant reputation is richly deserved. Sri Iyer has put in immeasurable effort and time and undergone untold difficulties to secure those Buddhist texts: going from region to region, from district to district, from town to town, from village to village, from street to street, from house to house; scrutinizing and refining the manuscripts so collected; writing commentaries and glossaries of rare words and expressions; accessing the histories of concerned Buddhist saints and studying the tenets and traditions of Buddhism. Thoughts of Buddhism dominate him constantly - while walking, while performing ritual ablutions, during the ritual Shiva Poojá and even while sleeping. But for such a passionate involvement the publication of rare works would not have at all been possible. This truth can readily be gleaned from his Introductions to his publications. He has quoted European scholars that Buddha did not really contradict the doctrines of the Brahmins. He has also pointed out that saints like Thirugnánasambandha Moorthy had contradicted Lord Buddha only because He has equivocated on the existence of God and the human soul, and not for any other reason."

"At the end portion of the book, he has printed a few Theváram hymns. Sri Iyer has successfully accomplished this research, possibly due to the 'punnyá' merits he had garnered in his past births. How? Look at the declaration in the *Pátthira Marabu Kádhai* chapter of *Manimekalai* that 'he was blessed to be born of a cow because of his innate

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benevolence to tender beings', and the special commentary of Parimelazhagar on verse 358 of Thirukkural; these assert that a man is reborn in the very form he cherished in his mind when his life parted from his body during his previous birth. It is well-nigh impossible to find someone in our times, to excel him in researching Buddhists' tenets. So I do hope that the Buddhists settled all over the world would express their profound gratitude to him and confer on him a title of distinction in accordance with their faith. If they fail to do so, they would be guilty of unpardonable ingratitude. Thanks to his great efforts, Sri Iyer could well be born as a Buddhist saint in his next incarnation. It is certain that Lord Buddha would bestow this benediction on Sri Iyer."

When I read this review by a well-meaning friend, I could not help laughing. I was not hurt by the satire inherent in his compliment. Is it at all necessary for me to point out how much of a lover of Tamil literature was this Ánandan, who had clubbed Chinthámani and other works with Buddhist literature."

My friends too laughed heartily on reading this review. I secured in my box the title of '*Boutha Samaya Prabandha Pravarthanáchária*r' (Master Propounder of Buddhist Sacred Texts), so unexpectedly! Only now has the time arrived to announce it. When Chinthámani was published, a Jain lady had affectionately called me *Bhavya Jeevan*, a 'Soul fit for Grace'; it did not make me a Jain. Now, this man has mockingly made me a Buddhist saint; this has not made me a Buddhist either.

I started devoting my attention to works such as *Ainkurunooru*, *Pathitruppatthu*, *Akanánooru* and *Puranánooru*.

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GLOSSARY

Abhishekam

Pouring fluid substances such as water, honey etc., over a consecrated idol as part of ritual worship.

Ádheenam

Religious establishment managed by ascetics for propogating Saivism.

Adhirasam

Kind of thick flat round cake made by fried sweetened rice flour.

Ágamá

Any of the scriptures of Saiva or Vaishnava sect.

Agaval

One of the four major metres in Tamil prosody. (Also Âsiriyappá)

Agraháram

A street or streets where only Brahmins live – a disappearing phenomenon.

Akam

A division of Tamil literature based on themes of love, familial relationship etc.

Akká

Elder sister

Alankáram

Adornment, make-up, empty rhetoric (in literature), a figure of speech.

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Álápaná

The exposition of a rágá as a prelude to a composition such as a kriti.

Alavotthal

Metric lines of equal length.

Ámavadai

A kind of Vadá made without onion. (vadá is a cutlet-like snack made of lentil or chick-pea paste and fried in oil.)

Ammá

Mother; it is also often used while addressing a younger female with affection.

Ammi

A rectangular slab of stone with a stone-roller used for grinding (spices etc.)

Angavastram

A somewhat ornate and formal upper cloth, usually a zari-bordered, long thin towel – worn over the shoulder by men.

Anná

Elder brother

Annadánam

Free distribution of food to the poor(as an act of charity or in fulfilment of a vow.)

Annapoorani

Goddess of plenty.

Appalam

Wafer-thin and round side-dish made of the flour of black gram (usually fried in oil).

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Arangetram

In olden days presenting one's work or composition in a learned assembly for approval; premier / debut performance.

Archaná

Ritual chanting of hymns and placement of offerings before an idol.

Árthi

A plate containing water mixed with turmeric and lime waved before newly-married couple or important persons.

Áseervádam

Blessings

Áshramá

Hermitage

Ásiriappá

(Same as Agaval)

Ásiriya Viruttham / Agaval Viruttham

Stanza of four lines of equal length each containing a minimum of six feet.

Avadhánam

Display and test of memory skill

Ayyo

An exclamation of wonder, pity, grief or pain

Besh

Particle used for expressing appreciation, 'Good'; 'Excellent'

Bhajan

Devotional music, often involving group singing.

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Bhakshanam

Snacks

Bharathanátyam

A classical form of dance as codified by Bharathá.

Brahmanárthá

Ritual feeding of Brahmins as a part of homage to the departed.

Brahmotsavam

Annual festival (in a temple that lasts for seven or more days)

Brahmachári

Unmarried man; celibate.

Bhává

Emotive content.

Chitrakavi

Verse composition fitted into figures.

Darshan

A benign audience.

Deepálankárá

Decoration with rows of lighted lamps.

Deepárádhaná

Waving lighted lamps three times clockwise before an idol, at the end of worship.

Deepávali

Means 'Garland of lamps'. This is a popular Hindu festival celebrated by lighting lamps and fireworks.

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Dharmá

Virtues as specified by scriptures or by custom.

Dhikshithars

Persons who have received the initiatory, or any succeeding rites of the Saivá religion; the Brahmins of Chidambaram formerly said to have been 3000 in number.

Dhoti

Unstitched garment for men that hangs from waist to ankle.

Diwán

A chief administrative officer of an Indian princely State.

Edukai

Rhyming technique in versification in which the second letters of the first words of the lines are either the same or similar.

Eduváricchuvadi

Olábook; Bundle of associated single palmscripts.

Ekádasi

The eleventh day either from the new moon or from the full moon on which the religious custom of fasting is observed.

Ezhudhák Kilavi

Words not committed to writing.

Ezhutthilakkanam

Grammar of words.

Fiddle

Violin

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Gáyathri Japá

A Hindu religious rite when Gayathri Manthrá is ritually repeated 108 or 1008 times.

Gnáni

Sage; saint.

Gotra

Common descent.

Gottu Vádyam

A stringed musical instrument similar to Veena, but without frets and played with a wooden peg.

Grahapravesam

Housewarming; a ceremony performed at the time of occupying a newly built house.

Grahasthá

A family man. One of the four stages of life.

Huzur Shreshtaga

A treasury official.

Irattai Manimálai

A verse genre consisting of 20 stanzas composed alternately in two types – Venpá and Kattalai Kalitthogai.

Jamakkálam

Thickly woven carpet-like fabric(to sleep or sit on).

Kalam

A measure of capacity for grains.

Kali

A dish made with millet flour thickened to the consistency of a pudding.

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Kalpaná

Imaginative aspects of music.

Kandi

A string of Rudrákshá beads worn round the neck.

Káni

A land measure equal to 4,400 sq.metres.

Karuvadám

A mixture of lentils and spices made into small lumps and dried in the sun.

Kárigai

A treatise on prosody (a verse composition in the form of an address to a woman)

Kárupáru

Superintendent.

Kathákálakshebam

A discourse involving stories from the Hindu epics and mythologies. It is often laced with musical rendition of hymns and verses.

Kattalai Kalitthogai

Kalitthurai with certain specifications.

Kattalai Kalitthurai

The general name of Viruttham of five feet.

Kattalai Thambirán

Ascetic appointed by the Head of a Saivite Mutt to supervise and administer the temples of the Mutt.

Kávyá

Epic.

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Kittipull

Tipcat game

Kolam

A simple and sometimes an elaborate design drawn in the front yard of the house with rice flour or white powder – a symbol of auspiciousness.

Kovai

A minor literary form in Tamil.

Kriti

A structured composition in Carnatic music with rhythmic element.

Kungumam

Saffron powder; the red dot worn on the forehead (usually by women).

Kuravanji

A 'minor' literary form in which a Kuravá woman is represented as describing to a maiden the future course of her love by reading her palm.

Kudir

Large barrel-like receptacle for storing grains

Kumbábhishekam

Consecration ceremony for newly constructed or renovated temples in which sanctified water is poured over the crown of towers and of other structures.

Kuzhambu

Thickened sauce or a kind of broth (for mixing with cooked rice)

Lingam

Symbol of Shivá (in stone or other materials)

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Mádam

A small niche in the wall usually meant to accommodate a tiny oil lamp.

Mandap

A large social hall normally used for weddings, discourses or concerts.

Manipraválam

A kind of Tamil prose (practised mainly by commentators) characterized by the presence of a large number of Sanskrit loan words

Manthrá

Sacred word or sound; utterance from sacred books.

Manthra japá

Meditation accompanied by manthrá

Manthra Poojá

Offer of worship accompanied by the chanting of manthrá.

Meemámsá

A School of Indian philosophy.

Melam

Two-sided drum.

Modhakam

Sweetmeat prepared by steaming rice-dough roll with sweet filling.

Monai

Alliteration in verse in which the first letter or sound is either the same in all or some 'seer'.

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Mridangam

A kind of cylindrical two-sided drum played by both hands as an accompaniment.

Muhoortham

Auspicious hour (in a wedding ceremony)

Munsiff

A native judge subordinate to a District Judge / the Revenue Head of an Indian village, the most important village official.

Nágaswaram

A South-Indian wind instrument noted for its majestic tonal quality. An instrument associated with South Indian Hindu temples, also played on auspicious occasions.

Naidatham

A literary work by Poet Adhiveerarámapándian adapted from Harshá's Naishádá.

Nalangu

Ritual-game at the time of wedding, played by the bride and the groom.

Nandidevá

The stone-image of bull, the mount of Shivá, placed on a pedestal facing the sanctum-sanctorum in a Shivá temple.

Navaráthri

A festival for the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, Saraswathi celebrated for nine days.

Náyanmár

A collective noun referring to the sixty-three Saiva saints.

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Nerisai

Metrical syllable consisting of a short or long vowel, alone or follwed by a consonant.

Nichayathámboolam

A custom in which parents exchange betel leaves etc., confirming an engagement; betrothal.

Nivedanam

Offering of food (to a deity).

Odhuvár

A person who has the right to sing Saivá devotional hymns in a temple.

Pátti

Grandmother.

Padam

Musical form on the theme of love song in slow tempo.

Padhikam

Poem of ten verses on the deity of a specified place.

Pallánkuzhi

Board with two rows of seven hollows, each filled with five counters / the game played by two using this board.

Pallavi

The opening of the first section of a composition; any group of words which could be repeated (with variation in tempo) so as to bring out the mastery of the artist over thálam (beat) and rágá.

Panchakacchá

A mode of wearing dhoti running one end of it through the crotch and tucking it up at the back.

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Panchapátrá

A special form of tumbler to keep water during poojá.

Pancharathnam

Five selected kritis of Saint Thyágarájá (sung in groups during the saint's commemorative festivals).

Pandal

A temporary shed with a flat roof made of plaited coconut leaves

Pandáram

A Saivite monk of a Mutt.

Pándi

Hopscotch game (played mostly by girls).

Páyasam

A South Indian sweet preparation in a liquid form in a creative combination of ingredients. A ceremonial or auspicious occasion in Tamilnadu is incomplete without páyasam.

Pazhayadu

Cooked rice kept soaking overnight in water.

Pillai Thamizh

A verse genre, the protagonist of which is taken to be a child, with its ten stages being celebrated.

Poli

A round, flat sweet (of maize flour) with a jaggery and coconut filling.

Pongal

A kind of preparation of boiled rice seasoned with salt, pepper, cumin seeds and ghee.

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Poojá

Worship of God/Goddess through ritual incantation songs and flowers.

Poonool

Sacred thread of three strands worn by men of certain castes.

Poruttham Grammar

It is a part of Tamil grammar dealing with poetic composition; in particular, it prescribes norms for the appropriate use of words etc.

Pottu

A bright red mark worn on the forehead by Hindu women.

Prabandam

A genre of literature classified as 'smaller work' in Tamil.

Prakáram

Paved paths around the sanctum-sanctorum.

Prasádam

(Nivedanam) - Sacred offering to a deity (distributed to devotees).

Punnyágaváchagam

Purificatory rites.

Puráná

Ancient epic.

Puzhungalarisi

Rice obtained from parboiled paddy.

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Rágá

A melody constituted by different notes. By different permutations and combinations of notes, different rágás are established.

Rasiká

Aficionado, connoisseur.

Rudrákshá

Nut of the (Rudrákshá) tree, worn around the neck or kept as beads of rosary by Saivites.

Saivite

A large Hindu sect worshipping Lord Shivá as the primary deity.

Sakunam

Omen, good or bad.

Samasthánam

A principality ruled by a 'maharájá', an euphemism for a petty ruler.

Sambandi

The parents of a daughter-in-law or son-in-law.

Sampradáyá

Esoteric traditions.

Sandyávandaná

Chanting of manthrás during morning, noon and evening.

Sannidánam

A form of address / reference for Heads of religious Mutts.

Sannidi

(In a temple) the chamber where the deity is installed.

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Sanyási

Ascetic

Saraswathi

Goddess of Learning.

Sathakam

A genre of literary work containing a hundred verses (having a deity as the protagonist).

Seemandam

Ceremony in the seventh or ninth month of the first pregnancy of a woman conducted in the house of her husband.

Seer

Metrical foot; rhythm measure.

Shastrá

Hindu religious texts, particularly dealing with norms of proper conduct, ritual duties and responsiblilities.

Shrárdhá

Ritual offering to the dead on the occasion of the death anniversary.

Siddhá

Yogi who does not subscribe to religious beliefs or rituals and who seeks to attain enlightenment through occult powers.

Siddhi

Occult powers.

Siledai

(In poetry) paronomasia /pun.

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Sloká

A verse in Sanskrit (recited during prayers).

Sthalapuránam

Legends associated with a temple or a sacred town.

Sthala Virukshá

The sacred tree associated with a holy site.

Streedanam

Things (normally in kind) brought by the bride as gifts from her parents.

Sugian

A sweetmeat.

Sumangali

Married woman (who is considered auspicious because her husband is alive).

Sundal

Boiled and spiced pulses served as snacks.

Swara

'Tone' or 'note' such as Sa,Ri, Ga, Ma, etc.(Western equivalent Do, Re, Mi etc.). There are also microtones called 'anuswara'.

Thalai

Metrical rhythm between the last syllable of a foot and the first syllable of the succeeding one.

Tháli / Mangalyá/ Thirumángalyam

A gold chain or a turmeric-smeared cord with holy pendant, tied by the bridegroom round the bride's neck at wedding.

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Thámbálam

Sálvar with a raised rim.

Thambi

Younger brother (Informal form of addressing a younger man).

Thambirán

Saivite monk in the institution founded by a guru, performing religious and administrative duties.

Thámboolam

Betel nut and areca nut (for chewing, for offering to guests, exchanging to conclude a marriage proposal).

Thenkuzhal

Savoury made of rice and green gram fried in oil.

Thanippádal

Occasional verse / stray verse.

Thavasi Pillai

Cook engaged for preparing vegetarian food.

Thiribu

Stanza in which letters, except the initial ones, are identical in each line but with change of meaning.

Thirumann

Chalk-like white earth used for drawing 'námam' (by Vaishnavites).

Thiruvilaiyádal

Lord's sporting acts of benediction or retribution.

Thuvaiyal

A strong relish prepared by grinding chilli with coconut, ginger, curry leaves etc.

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Ucchishta Ganapathy

Ganapathi (Vináyaká) idol in a standing posture.

Uddarani

Small brass or copper spoon used in poojá or rituals.

Ulá

A literary genre (in which the women of the town are said to fall in love with the hero when he goes in procession).

Upanayanam

Ceremony among certain castes that initiates a boy into the stage of Brahmacharya in life, allowing him to wear 'poonool'.

Vadakalai

One of the two sects of Vaishnavites.

Vaishnavites

Worshippers of Lord Vishnu - God, the Protector.

Vakil

Lawyer.

Varāgan:

(ancient) gold coin (with a face value of three and a half rupees).

Vatthal

Selected vegetables / rice or sagopaste processed by drying.

Vennpá

One of the four major metres of Tamil prosody.

Vibhoothi / Thiruneeru

Sacred ash.

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Vidyábhyásam

A ceremony connected with a child's beginning to learn the alphabets.

Vináyaká

A popular god of the Hindu tradition with an elephant face and a human torso.

Viruttham

A kind of metre in Tamil prosody; a kind of musical form.

Vyákaranam

Grammatical text.

Yamagam

Repetition of identical words in a stanza, with a change of meaning by splitting words differently.

Yanthra poojá

A copper plate with a mystical diagram drawn on it kept in the poojá room with the belief that it will drive away evil spirit or bring good luck and prosperity.

Yāpperunkala Kārigai

A treatise of Tamil prosody.

Yoga

Yoga School (of Indian Philosophy; meditation).

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IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE LIFE OF U.V.SÂMINÂTHA IYER

19.2.1855	- He was born on a Monday, in the place called Sooriya Moolai in Thanjâvoor Dis trict in Tamil Nadu, South India.
1861	- He bagan to learn from Ariyaloor Sadagopa Iyengâr.
1862	- Sacred thread ceremony: Name: Venkatarâman.
16. 6. 1868	- Marriage - Wife Madhurâmbâl.
1869	- He learnt Yâpperunkalak Kârigai from Chenganam - Viruddâchala Mudaliyâr.
1871	- He got admitted as a student of Thirisirapuram Mahâ Vidvân Sri Meenâkshisundaram Pillai in Mâyuram.; met Sri Gopalakrishna Bhârathiâr; He was given the name Sâminâthan by his teacher; he came into contact with the Head of Thiruvâvaduthurai Âdheenam, Sri Subramania Desikar and Vidwân Thyâgarâsa Chettiâr and earned their support.
1872	- Accompanied his teacher to Thiruvâvaduthurai.

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1873	-	Composed poem in Utthamadânapuram. Delivered discourse on Purânâ in Âvudaiyâr Temple.
1874	-	Began writing his first book in Chenganam . The name of the book: 'Neeli Irattai Manimâlai'. Discourse on Thiruvilaiyâdal Purânam.
31.1.1876	-	Demise of Teacher. Meeting with Vedanâyagam Pillai. Functioning as student as well as teacher in Thiruvâvaduthurai Mutt.
1877	-	Iyer's father meeting Sri Subramania Desikar, Head of Âdheenam; Desikar building a home for Iyer. Givng Mâdhavedanam.
1878	-	Travel to Madurai, Tirunelveli. Sri Subramania Desikar, Head of Âdheenam honouring Iyer with a reward.
1880	-	Due to the great efforts of Vidwân Thyâgarâsa Chettiâr, getting employment as a Tamil Teacher in Kumbakonam College. Meeting with Salem Râmasâmi Mudaliyâr; Beginning the editing and publishing work of Seevaga Chinthâmani. Befriending some Jains.
1883	-	Publication of Thirukkudanthai Purânam.
1884	-	Retrieving ancestral land from mortgage; first visit to Madras.
1885	-	Mahâmaham. Sri. Subramania Desikar honouring Iyer's father and Iyer with 'Peethâmbaram' and also gifting a golden

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jewel called 'Chandrahâram' to Iyer's son Kalyânasundarayyar.

1887 - Completing the editing and publishing of Seevaga Chinthâmani and releasing it to the Tamil literary world.

1888 - Mahâsannidânam of Thiruvâvaduthurai reaching the feet of God. Thyâgarâsa Chettiar's demise. Searching for palmleaves in Nellai District.

1889 - Printing of Patthuppâttu completed. Editing and publication work of Silappadhikâram began. Coming to Madras and taking part in the Arangetram' of 'Kacchikkalambagam,' composed by Poondi Aranganâtha Mudaliâr.

1891 - Paris Professor Julian Winson writing appreciatively on Seevaga Chinthâmani.Sacred thread ceremony for his son.

1892 - Death of Salem Râmasâmi Mudaliâr. Completion of Silappadhikâram's editing and publication. On the invitation of Bhâskara Sethupathi, went to Râmanâthapuram and took part in Navarâthri festival.

7.10.1893 - Father passing away.

10.12.1893- Poondi Aranganâtha Mudaliâr passing away.

27.1.1893 - Mahâ Vaidyanâtha Iyer reaching the feet of Lord.

1894 - Puranânooru printing and publication. Meeting with Pândithurai Thevar; Buying a house in Kumbakonam. Editing and publication of Purapporull Vennpâ Mâlai.

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1895	-	Letter correspondence with G.U.Pope.
1898	-	Completion of editing and publication of Manimekalai.
1903	-	Getting a transfer to Presidency College in Madras from Kudanthai.
1.1.1906	-	Receiving the title of 'Mahâmahopâdhyâya'. Department of Education honouring him with Rs.1000. Having a conversation with the Governor of Madras. Lord Karmichael and earning appreciation from him. Completion of the editing and publication of Thiruvâlavâyudaiyâr Thiruvilaiyâdal Purânam.
1909	-	Buying a house in Madras and naming it 'Thyâgarâsa Vilâsam'.
12.12.1911	-	In commemoration of the coronation of King George, received a coronation pension of Rs.100 annually.
24. 1.1912	-	The governor came to his Tamil class and stayed there for 1½ hours.Showing him the Tamil palmleaves and coining a 'Vâzhthuppâ' on him.
1916	-	Appointed as a Member in the Dravidian Board of the University of Mysore.
31.1.1917	-	Given the title 'Drâvida Vidyâ Booshanam' by Kâsi Bharatha Dharma Mahâmandalam.
1.3.1917	-	Appointed as a Board Member and Ex aminer in Kasi University.
8.5. 1917	-	Wife dies.

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1.4.1919	-	Retirement (after 39 years of service). Going to Ravindra Nath Tagore's house and discussions with him.
13. 1. 1922	-	Receiving 'Killeth' from His Excellency the Prince of Wales during his visit to Madras.
12.2.1924	-	Completion of editing and publication of Perunkadhai.
1924 – 27	-	Assuming the position of the Principal of Chidambaram Tamil College.
1925	-	Receiving the title of honour 'Dâkshinâthya Kalânidhi' from Jagathguru Sri Sankarâ châryа Swâmigal, Head of Kamakoti Mutt.
1927	-	Under the auspices of Madras University, delivering a series of lectures for 10 days on the topic 'Sangam Tamil and the Tamil of the later years'.
21.3.1932	-	Receiving honorary doctorate from the University of Madras.
1932	-	Being the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the Conference of Tamil Lovers.
4. 3. 1933	-	Becoming a Member in the Tamil Board of Andhra University. Writing and publishing the biography of Meenâkshisundaram Pillai.
1935	-	His 80th Birthday celebrated all over the country.
1937	-	Kurunthokai published.

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16.1. 1937	-	Iyer's portrait unveiled at the Gopalarâo Library, Kudanthai.
6.2.1937	-	Participated in Sanâdhana Dharma Conference.
27. 3. 1937	-	Bhârathiya Sâhityavidyâ Parishad, chaired by Mahatmâ Gândhi. Delivering the welcome address. Interaction and conversing with Mahâtmâ Gândhi.
11.1.1938	-	Participated in the banquet hosted by the Viceroy in Madras.
15.3.1938	-	Taking part in the special lecture at the meeting of the Oxford Sanskrit Teachers Discourse; Manimekalai was lauded at the meeting.
1.8. 1939	-	Delivering the keynote address at the Inauguration of Koppanâppatti College.
25. 11. 1939	-	Began to write 'Kurippurai' or special annotation for Chevvaisooduvâr Bhâgavatham.
28.11.1939	-	Both T.K.C and Kalki came to see him and had a hearty discussion with him.
7.12.1939	-	Greeting message at the Diamond Jubilee of The Hindu newspaper.
15. 12. 1939	-	Writing the first chapter of 'The Story of My Life' (Autobiography) for publishing in Ânanda Vikatan .
12. 6. 1940	-	Writing verses and sending songs in connection with Kootthanoor Kalaimagal.

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5. 8. 1941	-	Conveying his opinion on the issue 'Thamizhisai' (Tamil Music) to music maestro Tiger Varadâchâriyâr.
29.9.1941	-	Delivering a speech on the topic "Which is Tamil" (Edhu Thamizh) in Thiruchirâp palli Radio.
7.12.1941	-	Kanagâbhishekam organized by great grandson.
13. 1. 1942	-	Stumbled and fell on the staircase in the house.
29.1.1942	-	Dr.Thirumoorthy comes and examines him. And, as per his advice, a photo of Iyer was taken by Sivarâmakrishna Iyer.
12.2.1942	-	Going to Thirukkazhukkunram.
27.4. 1942	-	Suffered high fever.
28.4.1942	-	Reaching the feet of god at 3.35 pm.
5.7.1943	-	Inauguration of Dr.U.V.Sâminâtha Iyer Library under the patronage of Rukmi-ni Arundel.
1948	-	His statue was installed in Madras Presidency College.
1955	-	Centenary Year Celebration.

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Dr. U.V.Saminatha Iyer's 'The Story of My Life' (En Charitthiram) is hailed by discerning scholars as one of the greatest autobiographies of world literature. A saga of the determined pursuit of an individual in search of palmleaf manuscripts of ancient Tamil classics, comparing multiple texts, establishing an authentic version with indefatigable application and uncompromising intellectual integrity and getting these published. But for his life of sheer dedication, many of the great ancient Tamil classics would have got buried in oblivion. The book also provides interesting insights into the social life of the times and pen pictures of many literary savants.

Dr. K.S. Subramanian (1937) served the Government of India (IRAS) from 1960 to 1975 and the Asian Development Bank from 1975 to 1998, retiring as a Director. He has translated about 40 Tamil literary works into English: novels, novellas, short stories, essays and poetry. His Papers in Tamil language on literary, social and developmental themes have appeared in 8 volumes. He is a Trustee of MOZHI Trust, a resource centre for Tamil language and culture. He is a former member of the Tamil Advisory Board of Sahitya Akademi.

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